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Batik of Java: Global Inspiration

Maria Wronska-Friend
The Cairns Institute, James Cook University, maria.friend@jcu.edu.au

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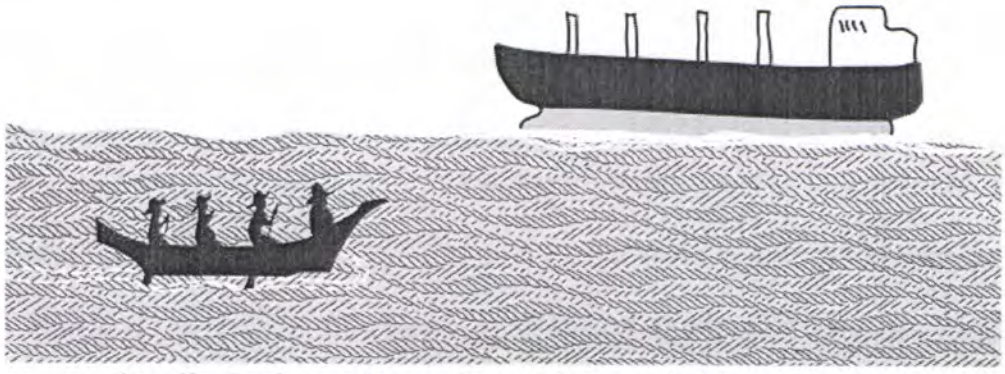
The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global



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Batik of Java: Global Inspiration

Maria Wronska-Friend

maria.friend@jcu.edu.au

Batik, the resist-dyeing technique of patterning cloth through the application of wax, has been known since antiquity in several parts of the world, but it reached its highest level of complexity on the island of Java. While deeply embedded in local traditions and associated with the beliefs, philosophy, and social order of Java, during the last two centuries batik has become a powerful cultural intermediary connecting Indonesia with other parts of the world. The aim of this paper is to outline the history of this process and determine the impact of the Javanese batik technique and aesthetics on textile traditions in Japan, West Africa, Europe, India, and Australia.

The underlying principle of wax-resist dyeing is that those parts of the cloth to remain undyed are covered with molten wax. In Javanese batik, wax is applied by hand with a small instrument called the *canting*, resulting in the creation of individual designs and providing each fabric with unique qualities. In mass-produced fabrics, the wax resist is applied with a copper stamp or *cap*. A distinctive feature of all Javanese batiks is that they are double-sided cloths, with identical patterns drawn on both sides.

The iconography of batik is quite complex, resulting from a harmonious merging of local, ancient motifs with ornamental borrowings from the traditions of India, China, the Middle East, and Europe.[1] Frequently, batik motifs have been invested with deep symbolic meanings and have been linked to the Javanese system of beliefs known as *kejawen*. Over centuries, batik has evolved into several regional and ethnic forms. For example, the blue-and-brown fabrics known as *kain sogan* associated with the traditions of local courts are typical for Central Java, while in the port cities on the northern coast of the island a cosmopolitan and multicolored style has evolved, with frequent references to Chinese and Indian heritage.

Japan

The Japanese encounter with Javanese batik textiles, known in Japan as *Jawa sarasa*, is a long-lasting process that began in the seventeenth century and continues today. Although it was a relatively small-scale engagement, never as intensive as the European or African encounters with Javanese textiles, nonetheless it proved very persistent over four centuries.

Javanese batik aesthetics entered the Japanese cultural paradigms of the Tokugawa era in an indirect way, through Indian trade textiles. In the seventeen and eighteen centuries the main supplier of these goods was the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Indian textiles destined for the Japanese market were dispatched from two ports on Java, controlled by the Dutch: Banten and Batavia (Jakarta). This trade, initiated in 1609, continued for more than two centuries, and during the years 1641 to 1854 the Dutch were the sole European traders operating in that market. There is no doubt that, in addition to generic Indian chintz and chintz produced specifically for the Japanese market, the consignments of textiles shipped

[1] Alit Djajasoebrata, *Flowers from Universe: Textiles of Java* (Volendam, The Netherlands: LM Publishers, 2018), 71–77, 107–23.

from Java to Nagasaki contained Indian textiles originally produced for Indonesian markets, known in the western part of the archipelago as *kain sembagi*.[2] They were decorated with motifs favored by the Malay and Javanese peoples, such as *tumpal* (rows of elongated triangles) and geometric medallions set in a grid of intersecting bands. *Kain sembagi* also became highly treasured in Japan, with large pieces incorporated into dress items and smaller ones used in the tea ceremony and as containers for precious objects.

Obi sash (far left) with the Javanese *tumpal* motif, probably made of *sembagi* cloth (right).
Left, *Beauties of the Eastern Quarter: Onaka and Oshima of Nakamachi*, approx. 1775–1777, by Kitao Shigemasa (Japanese, 1739–1820). Ink and colors on paper. *Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. Gift of the Grabhorn Ukiyo-e Collection*, 2005.100.62. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.
Right, Waist wrap cloth with *tumpal* motif in the style of Indian *sembagi* trade textiles, northern coast of Java, late 19th–early 20th century. Hand-drawn wax resist (*batik tulis*) on cotton. Krzysztof Musial collection.

In addition to the export of *kain sembagi*, there is evidence that from the seventeenth century onward small quantities of original Javanese batiks also entered the market. Although the VOC did not trade in Javanese textiles, batik might have been present in the cargo of private traders or sent to Japan as gifts.[3] In the first half of the seventeenth century, in Batavia, there was a distinct Japanese community numbering approximately 300 to 400 persons.[4] One of the residents was Cornelia Cnoll, a young woman of Dutch-Japanese descent whose mother lived in Hirado. In a letter sent from Batavia in April 1671, Cornelia lists the gifts sent to her

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[2] John Guy noted that many of the *sarasa* used in Japan were the same as cloths made in India and found in western Indonesia, especially Sumatra and Malaysia. See John Guy, *Woven Cargoes. Indian Textiles in the East* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 170, 174.

[3] Javanese textiles do not feature in the list of goods exported by the VOC from Batavia to Japan. See Ruurdje Laarhoven, *The Power of Cloth: The Textile trade of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) 1600–1780*, PhD thesis (Canberra: Australian National University, 1994), 215–18, 359–74.

[4] Iwao Seiichi, "Japanese Emigrants in Batavia During the 17th Century," *Acta Asiatica*, no. 18 (1970), 1–25.

mother and relatives. Apart from a range of diverse chintz fabrics, she presented her mother with two pieces of batik fabric.[5]

The overwhelming interest in *sarasa* led in the eighteenth century to local Japanese production of textiles resembling imported Indian chintz. Known as *wasarasa* (Japanese *sarasa*), they replicated designs of Indian trade textiles through a simplified dyeing technology. Production of *wasarasa* resulted in a wide dissemination of Indian chintz designs among those groups in Japanese society that could not afford to purchase original *sarasa*. *Kain sembagi* designs were included in the production of *wasarasa*. At the end of the eighteenth century motifs of "exotic textiles" started to circulate even more widely, following the publication of *sarasa* manuals known as *sarasa benran*.[6]

It is obvious that already during the Tokugawa era (1603–1867) Javanese batik (*Jawa sarasa*) was recognised in Japan as a distinctive group of textiles, and its characteristic features were known to at least some consumers. In 1829 the Netherlands Trading Society (Nederlandsche Handelmaatschappij) sent to the trading post in Nagasaki industrial imitations of Javanese batik textiles printed in Belgium, called *batiksche sitzen* (batik chintz) or *dubbelde batiks* (copy batiks). In response to this shipment, the officials in Nagasaki advised that only high-quality copies of Javanese batiks, printed on both sides, would be accepted by Japanese consumers. Clearly double-sided decoration was recognised in Japan, as on Java, as a distinctive feature of batik textiles.[7]

The beginning of the Meiji Restoration (1868) meant the opening of Japan to the outside world and the establishment of direct contacts with foreign countries. Indirectly, it led to the introduction of the wax-resist dyeing technique to Japanese textile arts, as Japanese artists and artisans traveling overseas at the beginning of the twentieth century became aware of European experiments with the batik technique. Equally significant was the opening of the ancient Shōsōin Imperial Repository in Nara. It revealed thousands of treasures, including a group of eighth-century textiles, some of them decorated with the distinctive wax-resist dyeing technique *rōkechi* that was abandoned in the following centuries. The modern Japanese technique of wax dyeing became known as *rōketsuzome*, and its pioneers were Tsuruichi Tsurumaki, Tomonosuke Ogō, Takeo Sano, and Matsugorō Hirokawa.[8] The revival of wax-resist dyeing led many Japanese artists to conduct close studies of Javanese batik, resulting in the use of the Javanese *canting* or wax-pen and, at times, the introduction of Indonesian motifs. In the following decades Japanese artists greatly modified the process of wax-resist dyeing by introducing technical innovations and new means of expression.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Japanese artists, scholars, and traders started to visit Indonesia, and direct commercial and cultural links were established between the two countries. One of the most well-known Japanese entrepreneurs was Sawabe Masao, who, in

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[5] Leonard Blussé, *Strange Company. Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia, Verhandelingen van Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land en Volkenkunde*, no. 122 (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1986), 191.

[6] Guy, *Woven Cargoes,* 175–77; Yoshimoto Kamon, *Wa sarasa monyō zukan* (Tokyo: Guraffikusha, 1976), 97.

[7] Algemeen Rijksarchief, Den Haag. Nederlandse Factorij in Japan 703, no. 42, 1829.
Hundreds of samples of Dutch textiles exported during the first half of 19th century to Japan and collected by the Nagasaki Customs are in the collection of the National Museum in Tokyo (no. TI-504). Book no. 49, dated the Bunsei era 12 (equivalent to 1829) features samples of double-sided, high-quality printed cloth imitating the style of Javanese batik. With high probability, these are the batik imitations that were mentioned in the Dutch report in the Algemeen Rijksarchief in Den Haag.

[8] Betsy Sterling Benjamin, *The World of Rozome. Wax-resist Textiles of Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1996), 100–10.

the 1920s and 1930s in Yogyakarta, Central Java, set up the batik workshop "Fuji" that specialized in the production of textiles and dress accessories for export to Japan. In 1927 the workshop employed 90 people, providing them with reasonable wages and good working conditions.[9]

During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia (1942–1945) Japanese interest in batik found its expression in the creation of a new type of cloth called *batik hokokai*. It featured high technical standards and very detailed, dense decoration that was an amalgamation of Chinese, Javanese, and Japanese motifs. These fabrics, usually produced in Chinese workshops on the northern coast of Java, were used by Japanese authorities as gifts to their supporters.

The Japanese fascination with Javanese batik continues today, with several workshops in Pekalongan and other central Javanese cities producing textiles for the Japanese market. Of particular significance is the Ardiyanto batik workshop in Yogyakarta, which specializes in the production of kimonos and *obi* decorated with Javanese motifs. It also makes lengths of silk for Western-style garments with motifs adjusted to the Japanese market, such as cherry blossoms. The company also has outlets in Tokyo.[10]

Japanese engagement with batik evolved from an indirect one, facilitated through Indian and Dutch agency, to a direct one in which Indonesian producers receive feedback from their representatives in Japan and even worked to specific orders sent by Japanese clients. Over four centuries of contact, the volume of Indonesian textiles entering Japan was never great; nevertheless, they left a definite imprint on Japanese textile decoration, fashion, and applied arts.

Africa

In the twentieth century machine-printed textiles with Javanese motifs became a staple cloth for more than 500 million people in West and Central Africa. Similar to Japan, the transfer of Javanese textile heritage to Africa occurred as a result of European agency, without the involvement of the Indonesian people.

African cottons with Javanese motifs have their roots in industrial imitations of Javanese batiks, printed throughout most of the nineteenth century in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, and the UK, for the lower strata of Indonesian society.[11] Following the peak of production in 1867, the market experienced a sharp decline. Subsequently, the initiative of Scottish merchant Ebenezer Brown Fleming, around 1890, to divert the flow of these textiles to the African Gold Coast was a welcome move.[12] Although Europe had been exporting various types of textiles to West Africa since at least the sixteenth century, textiles with Javanese motifs were a new product on this market. They were embraced by local consumers

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[9] P. de Kat Angelino, *Batikrapport* 2: *Midden-Java* (Weltevreden: Kantoor van Arbeid, 1930–31), 175, 189. Peter Post, "Indonesianisasi and Japonization," in *Indonesian Economic Decolonization in Regional and International Perspective,* eds. J. Thomas Lindblad and Peter Post (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2009), 61–86. Samples of Fuji batiks that illustrate the Central Javanese process *kain sogan* are in the collection of the National Museum in Tokyo, no. TI-349-17.

[10] Research conducted by the author on Java, August 2018.

[11] Maria Wronska-Friend, "The early production of Javanese batik imitations in Europe (1813–1840)," in *Kunst und Geschichte des Glarner und europäischen Zeugdrucks*, ed. Reto D. Jenny, *Glarner Tuch Gespräche* 10/11 (Ennenda, Switzerland: Comptoir von Daniel Jenny & Cie., 2017), 49–57.

[12] Helen Elands, "Dutch Wax Classics. The designs introduced by Ebenezer Brown Fleming circa 1890–1912 and their legacy," in *African-Print fashion Now!* ed. Suzanne Gott et al. (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum at UCLA, 2017), 53–61.

Gold Coast was the colonial name given to the coastal territory of today's Ghana.

with great enthusiasm and demand grew very quickly.[13] At the beginning of the twentieth century all European factories that previously specialized in batik imitations destined for Southeast Asia, shifted the core of their production to African markets.

Following the African independence era of the 1960s, and given the need to develop local industry, the bulk of production moved to African countries, with textile factories set up in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Togo, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Another shift in the global history of African prints took place in the last decade of the twentieth century, as China became a new producer and soon dominated the market, undercutting local production and, in a number of cases, leading to the closure of African factories.[14]

European agency in bringing the Javanese textile heritage to Africa proved very successful and long-lasting. Archival records indicate that initially, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, textiles exported to African markets closely resembled copies of Javanese batiks produced for Indonesia. Gradually the Javanese design vocabulary and the technology of printing were adjusted to the needs of African consumers, with European designers assuming the role of cultural translators between these two distant parts of the world.

Javanese batik inspired contemporary African prints in several ways: by the use of the resist-dyeing technique, the introduction of the principles of spatial composition, and a range of new motifs and color combinations favored on Java. Industrial copies of Javanese batiks stimulated the development of two major groups of African fabrics: "wax prints" manufactured through industrial resist-printing, and much cheaper "Java prints" or "fancy prints," the result of direct printing. Due to the complex, highly specialized method of manufacturing, wax prints became luxury goods, while direct-printed textiles form the bulk of production.

In Javanese batik the effect of colorful veining (*remek*) that results from the intentional cracking of the layer of wax is used very sparingly, as technical perfection and total control of the medium are the most highly prized attributes of these textiles. In Africa, however, a strongly pronounced veining effect has become a distinctive, highly appreciated feature of these textiles. To achieve this effect in the production of wax prints, following the resist application but prior to the first dyeing, a special machine crumples the cloth and breaks the layer of resist in an irregular way. The ensuing process of immersion dyeing yields the desired veining effect, while additional colors are surface-printed. In "fancy prints" and "Java prints" the networks of colorful veins that imitate wax-cracking are printed directly on the cloth.

The motifs and designs of Javanese batiks have also undergone a process of deep adaptation. In many respects African design aesthetics are the opposite of the highly refined and subdued style of Javanese textiles, as local consumers prefer larger designs, brighter colors, and open, clearly expressed patterns. Therefore, when transferred to Africa, the Javanese motifs were enlarged, simplified, and presented in a bolder, contrasting range of colors. All major Javanese motifs appear on African prints, although they have frequently been extracted from

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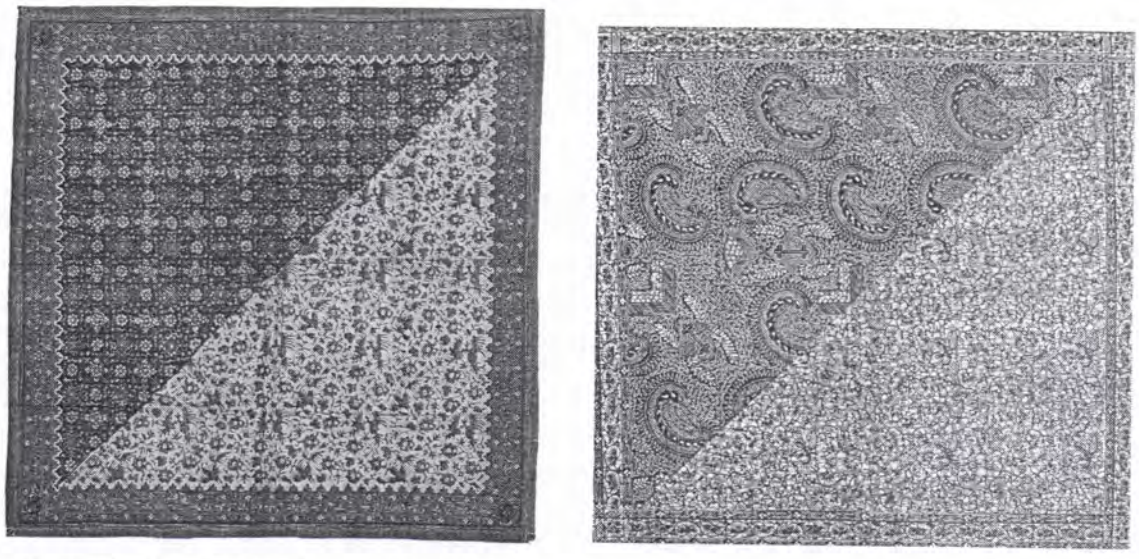
[13] In the 1870–80s the Dutch factory P.F. van Vlissingen & Co. (now Vlisco) attempted to sell copies of Javanese batiks in East Africa. They also introduced some Javanese motifs to *kanga* textiles. See MacKenzie Moon Ryan, "A Decade of Design: The Global Invention of the Kanga, 1876–1886," *Textile History* 48, no. 1 (2017), 101–32.

[14] Salihu Maiwada and Elisha Renne, "The Kaduna textile industry and the decline of textile manufacturing in Northern Nigeria, 1955–2010," *Textile History* 44, no. 2 (2013), 171–96.

their original context and combined with new motifs derived from African or European traditions. Some Javanese motifs, such as the patchwork *tambal* or cone-like *lar* (a wing of the mythical bird Garuda) have become "classic" African designs, printed repeatedly over several decades with only minor adjustments to their layout and color.

An important characteristic of African prints is the distinctive *horror vacui*, a feature that makes these fabrics so vibrant and expressive. This aversion to free, undecorated space in surface arrangements has its roots in Javanese batik aesthetics. In African prints, as in Javanese batik, the confines of large motifs or the background of the cloth are covered with small, densely placed abstract ornaments. Almost all of them—scrolls, dots, small spirals, zig-zag motifs, or hatchings—have been borrowed directly from the vocabulary of Javanese batik, where they are known as *isen*. In some cases, even a particular color combination favored on Java has crossed over to Africa: or example, a large group of African prints replicate the blue-and-brown colors of the *sogan* batiks of Central Java.



Javanese head scarf (left) with *pagi-sore* composition ("morning and afternoon") and wax print for West African market (right), with the same arrangement called "day and night." The upper section of the African cloth features the popular Javanese *lar* motif (wing of Garuda).
Left: Hand-drawn wax resist (*batik tulis*) on cotton. Java, late 19th—early 20th century. Rudolf Smend collection.
Right: Cotton wax print produced by Vlisco, the Netherlands, for the West African market, approx. 2012.

As on Java, cloth in African societies functions as a facilitator of the spoken word. The type of fabric and its patterns act as an important medium of visual communication, conveying messages about the wearer's social position, personal status, and even emotions. In the cultural milieu of Africa, Javanese motifs received new names and new identities. As the connection between Indonesia and West Africa was not a direct one but facilitated through European intermediaries, Indonesian names and meanings were not carried over; in most cases, African consumers are not even aware of the Javanese roots of their textiles. For example, the rows of elongated triangles, known on Java as the *tumpal* motif, in Ghana received the name "Pencils of President Kwame Nkrumah."[15] The only case of an Indonesian name transferred to West African textiles is the diagonal composition of opposing darker and lighter sections, known in Javanese batik as *pagi-sore* ("morning and afternoon") and in African prints as "day and night."

[15] Interviews conducted by the author in Ghana, February 2018.

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CHENNAI

Nelson Mandela's fascination with Javanese batik represents a separate chapter in the history of textile connections between Indonesia and Africa. In the 1990s, during one of his visits to Indonesia, Mandela received six batik shirts from President Suharto. Designed by Iwan Tirta, Indonesia's most famous couturier, the shirts were made of high-quality, hand-decorated silk batiks, and Mandela wore them on a number of formal occasions. In the ensuing years Mandela ordered at least a dozen similar shirts from Tirta. There is no doubt that for Mandela the act of wearing an Indonesian batik shirt was not a political statement but a personal, aesthetic choice.[16]

Just over a century since their introduction to Africa, cottons with Javanese designs have undergone extensive technical development and aesthetic adaptation. Invested with new meanings, the textile heritage of Java has been deeply assimilated into West African cultural traditions, becoming an integral part of local culture and frequently used as a highly evocative expression of African identity.

In the 1970s Western craft advisors introduced the wax-resist dyeing technique to African cottage industry. It is termed "batik" and, as it employs hand-drawn or hand-printed wax resist, it has some affinity with the technique of Javanese batik; nevertheless, these fabrics evolved without any reference to the textile traditions of Java and constitute a new, fully autonomous group of African textiles.

Europe

The introduction of the batik technique to the Netherlands around 1890 was another outcome of colonial encounters. In a short time batik gained significant popularity, and a decade later the Javanese method of textile decoration was practiced all over Europe, becoming a distinctive feature of Art Nouveau and Art Deco.

The Javanese technique attracted the attention of European artists and artisans for two reasons. First, towards the end of the nineteenth century Europe experienced renewed interest in handwork as a result of growing opposition to industrial, mass-produced objects. The ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris found many followers on the European continent and resulted in an appreciation of high-quality handmade objects. The second reason was the fascination with Far Eastern arts. While artists in London and Paris were captivated by the art of Japan, the Dutch searched for inspiration in the cultural traditions of their colonies, especially Indonesia. In the process, they discovered the Javanese technique of batik, which was useful for creating high-quality decorative objects of unique character.

Around 1892 a group of young artists in Amsterdam (Carel Lion Cachet, Gerrit Dijsselhof, and Theo Nieuwenhuis) started to conduct experiments with batik. Initially the wax-dyeing technique was employed in interior decoration to achieve a harmonious, integrated style in which all decorative elements would be executed in the same range of colors with the same or similar designs.[17] Given the growing demand for textiles decorated with the Javanese technique, in 1897 Agatha Wegerif-Gravestein set up, in Apeldoorn, the first atelier in Europe specializing in the mass production of batiks. Besides producing a large range of decorative textiles, she introduced the technique to the decoration of garments.

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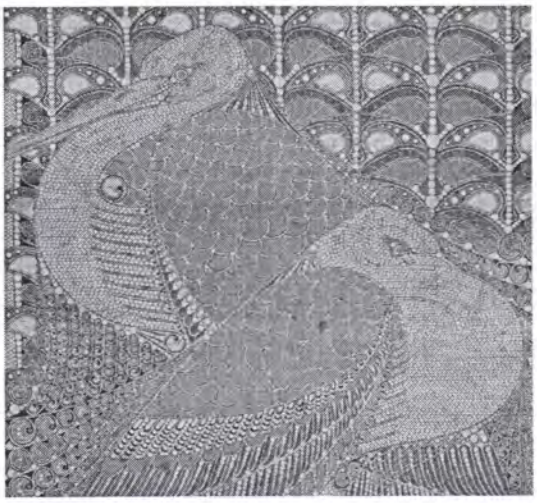
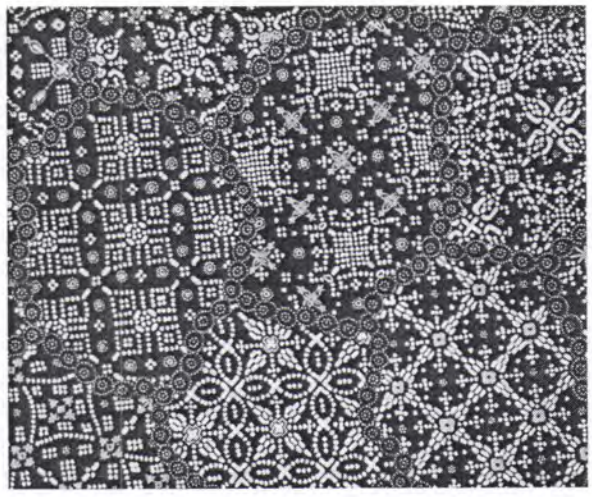
[16] Maria Wronska-Friend, *Batik Jawa bagi Dunia. Javanese Batik to the World* (Jakarta: Indonesian Cross-Cultural Community, 2016), 134–35.

[17] Joop Joosten, "De batik en de vernieuwing van de nijverheidskunst in Nederland 1892–1903," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 23 (1972), 407–21.

Following the 1900 World Exposition in Paris, where a range of Dutch batiks was exhibited, the technique found new practitioners all over Europe. The peak of the popularity of batik falls during the years 1905 to 1930, when it was practiced by thousands of artists, artisans, and amateurs. Apart from the Netherlands, batik became especially popular in Germany, France, Poland, Austria, Great Britain, and the United States. The range of textiles and their applications was very diverse. Batik fabrics were frequently used in interior decoration as cushions, curtains, furniture lining, and to create a range of special garments, but also in *haute couture* where batik became the embodiment of Oriental fantasy. In 1911, in Paris, Paul Poiret designed a series of evening coats decorated with the batik technique and Oriental motifs. In the 1920s Marguerita Pangon continued the trend of creating opulent batik garments in an Art Deco style, destined for an exclusive clientele that included some of the crowned heads of Europe.[18]

In its early stage the rapidly growing interest in batik was hampered by technical problems, especially the lack of suitable synthetic dyes to produce durable colors at low temperatures. Consequently, in 1900 the laboratory of the Koloniaal Museum in Haarlem set up a research project with the aim of adapting the Javanese technique to the needs of European practitioners. In the process, the laboratory staff conducted several hundred experiments with natural dyes, mordants, and various types of wax compounds. A practical recommendation was to use a blue-and-brown range of colors (indigo and catechu).[19] The dyes were easily available in Europe, produced permanent colors, and, importantly, were used in the production of the *sogan* batiks of Central Java, which were widely recognized as "the most beautiful and aristocratic type of Javanese batik."[20] The Haarlem Laboratory exhibited Dutch batik at several exhibitions in Europe (Italy, Germany, Denmark, and Belgium), and the brochure promoting Haarlem-style batik was translated into at least five languages. Subsequently, a large number of European batiks created at the beginning of the twentieth century replicated the Central Javanese range of blue and brown *kain sogan* textiles.





Left: Chris Lebeau, The Netherlands, 1905. Detail of a three-part screen produced in the Javanese *nitik* (dot) style with the *sogan lorodan* technique. Silk, hand-drawn wax resist, natural dyes. Collection S.S.K., Provinciaal Museum van Drenthe, Assen, no. E1994-0260.

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[18] Wronska-Friend, *Batik Jawa bagi Dunia*, 43–87.
[19] Maria Wronska-Friend, "Javanese batik for European artists: experiments at the Koloniaal Laboratorium in Haarlem," in *Batik Drawn in Wax*, ed. Itie van Hout (Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 2001), 106–23.
[20] Gerret Pieter Rouffaer, "Batikken," in *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* 1 (s'Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1917), 193.

Right: Detail of a waist wrap cloth (*kain panjang*) with motifs in the *nitik* (dot) style in the blue-and-brown range of colors (*kain sogan*). Cotton with hand-drawn resist (*batik tulis*), Winotosastro batik workshop, Yogyakarta, Java, 2011.

The laboratory at the Koloniaal Museum closely collaborated with a group of artists associated with the School of Applied Arts in Haarlem. From 1901 to 1908 they created an exceptional range of batik textiles that testify to a deep internalization not only of the technique but also of the aesthetics of Javanese *kain sogan* textiles. Most outstanding are the works of Chris Lebeau, representing a very high level of technical accomplishment in wax drawing and dyeing. Similar to the best works of Javanese masters, his batiks were produced in a highly controlled and detailed manner, avoiding the cracking of wax or other accidental effects. In addition, Lebeau executed most of his batiks in a style similar to the Javanese *nitik*, in which the outlines of ornaments are composed not of continuous lines but of thousands of tiny dots of wax.[21]

The deep assimilation of Javanese principles of textile decoration is further illustrated by batiks produced in Poland at the Warsztaty Krakowskie, or Krakow Workshops, during the years 1913 to 1926. In Poland the perception of the Javanese technique differed significantly from the rest of Europe, where batik was usually perceived as an exotic Oriental technique. Specifically, in Poland a similar technique of wax-resist dyeing has been used for centuries in the decoration of Easter eggs, known as *pisanki*. Thus, here, batik was recognized as a local, indigenous tradition that was transferred from an egg-shell to a cloth surface. At the same time, members of the Krakow Workshops closely studied the Javanese principles of surface decoration. In the process, numerous Javanese motifs were combined with elements of Polish folk art, resulting in an unusual fusion known as "Javanese-Krakow style."[22]

Yet the majority of European artisans who practiced batik adapted the principles of the Javanese technique in a rather superficial way. The attempts to conduct deep, systematic studies of the Javanese textiles, as they were done at Haarlem or Krakow, were quite rare. Similarly, attempts to recreate handmade copies of Javanese textiles in Europe were sporadic.[23] As a highly flexible technique, batik allowed a great degree of personal expression, and European artists and artisans used this medium in their own individual ways; a uniform, pan-European style of batik never developed.

Growing market demand for European batik meant that in most cases the Javanese technique had to be simplified and adjusted to the expectations of consumers. The most important feature of batik, its capacity for high-quality designs of artistic merit, was frequently compromised. A common feature of European batiks was a strongly pronounced veining effect resulting from the purposeful cracking of the layer of wax, pioneered in the Wegerif atelier. This crackled effect was regarded as evidence that a wax resist was used and that a particular cloth was made by hand rather than an industrial method.

The European fascination with the batik technique led, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to the introduction of Javanese motifs and aesthetics into the works of several European artists and designers. Most notable were Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Henri Matisse, and Henry van de Velde.

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[21] Wronska-Friend, *Batik Jawa bagi Dunia*, 69–74.

[22] Maria Wronska-Friend, *Sztuka Woskiem Pisana. Batik w Indonezji i w Polsce* (Warszawa: Gondwana 2008), 133–89.

[23] German painter Max Fleischer and his Javano-Dutch wife Maria Wiemans set up a batik workshop in Berlin, in 1902, in which they used batik patterns and natural dyes brought from Java. See Robert Breuer, "Batiks," *Kunst und Handwerk* 54 (1903–4): 333–39.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Henri Matisse both had collections of Javanese batiks. Although they never practiced the batik technique, they closely studied Javanese batik ornamentation. Mackintosh, during his stay in London from 1916 to 1923, created a series of textile designs that echo Javanese motifs such as *parang curigo* and *sekar jagad*. Henri Matisse's drawings from 1937 also reflect several Javanese motifs, especially *parang rusak* and *tumpal*.[24]

The fascination with batik demonstrated by Henry van de Velde, a Belgian designer and architect based in Weimar, Germany, from 1901 to 1916, was quite different. Well aware of his clients' interest in batik, for reasons of efficiency he decided to use industrial imitations printed in the Netherlands for his interior-design projects, rather than handmade batiks. He also promoted them as a cloth for fashionable garments worn by his family and friends. In this way Dutch batik imitations, destined for the lower strata of Indonesian society, became a fashionable fabric for garments worn by the German artistic and financial elite.[25]

In the 1930s, as new tendencies dominated Western design, the popularity of the batik technique in European decorative arts started to diminish. However, batik did not disappear completely from Western art and design. In the ensuing decades it gained popularity in the fine arts as a medium for resist-dyed paintings. In crafts, wax-resist dyeing has become a global phenomenon, practiced in most parts of the world. More than a century since its introduction to Europe, the batik technique, practiced by several generations of artists and artisans who continuously test its technical limits and artistic potential, has undergone a deep transformation and shows little affinity to the Javanese method of textile decoration.

India

Although the technique of wax-resist dyeing has been practiced in India for several centuries, its current version, inspired by Javanese batik, is the outcome of Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Java and Bali in 1927.

Tagore, the prominent Indian writer, philosopher, and composer who received the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature, was keen to restore ancient cultural links that had connected India and Indonesia for almost a millennium. Therefore, the main objective of his visit to Indonesia was "to study Hindu influence in Javanese religion, art and music."[26]

Aware of those interests, his hosts prepared a special program that included a number of cultural events. Among them were batik presentations witnessed on several occasions by Tagore and accompanying Bengali scholars and artists, while high-quality batik textiles featured prominently among the gifts presented to them.[27] However, Tagore's interest in Indonesian textiles went further: his group purchased additional batik fabrics and tools in the shops and markets of Surakarta and Yogyakarta. One of his companions, Surendranath Kar, took practical lessons in the batik technique.

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[24] Wronska-Friend, *Batik Jawa bagi Dunia*, 83–87.

[25] Maria Wronska-Friend, "Fernöstliche Faszination: Henry van de Velde und die javanische Batik. Oriental fascination: Henry van de Velde and Javanese batik," in Thomas Föhl and Antje Neumann, eds., *Henry van de Velde. Raumkunst und Kunsthandwerk. Interior Design and Decorative Arts* 2: *Textilien. Textiles* (Leipzig: Seemann Verlag, 2014), 369–97.

[26] Telegram sent by Tagore to the British Consul in Batavia, 29.05.1927. Leiden University Library, Arnold A. Bake Collection, DH 1214.

[27] Supriya Roy, ed., *Letters from Java. Rabindranath Tagore's Tour of South-East Asia 1927* (Kolkata: Visva-Bharati, 2010), 104–7.

Tagore's awareness of the creative potential of batik preceded his visit to Java, likely resulting from the Western fascination with batik at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1923 Pratima Devi, Tagore's daughter-in-law, learned the principles of batik during a visit to Paris. On returning to Santiniketan, Tagore's place of residence in Bengal, she set up a small batik workshop.[28] Presumably, Tagore was keen to introduce the batik technique to the curriculum of the Kala Bhavana art college in Santiniketan, and his trip to Java provided the opportunity to further his knowledge of Javanese textiles and the methods of their production.

The collection of the Kala Bhavana Nandan Museum at Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan contains more than 30 Javanese batiks registered around 1930–31; almost all of them were brought from Indonesia by Tagore and his companions.[29] Most of them are medium-quality, blue-and-brown *kain sogan* textiles from Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Their condition indicates intensive use: in the 1930s these fabrics were frequently borrowed from the museum's collection and used as costumes and stage decorations in Tagore's dance dramas (*nrityanatya*) that toured India, as well as in Javanese-style dances.

The same fabrics were used as instructional materials in batik classes taught at Kala Bhavana under the guidance of Surendranath Kar. The new technique was taken up with great enthusiasm and soon found many followers. Among the most gifted students were the sisters Gouri Bhanja and Jamuna Sen, who later worked as art teachers at Kala Bhavana and contributed greatly to the development of the characteristic style of Santiniketan batiks.

Although Tagore's companions brought Javanese batik tools to Santiniketan, local practitioners decided to simplify the technique by applying the wax resist with a brush: a small one to draw the design outlines, and a large, flat one to apply the wax-and-paraffin mixture to large sections of fabric such as the central field of the sari. The use of the brush led to a more spontaneous style of surface decoration than the closely controlled drawing of Javanese batik with the wax-pen.

Students at Kala Bhavana carefully analyzed the principles of Javanese batik decoration, and one assignment required them to make a batik cloth in the Javanese style.[30] However, Indonesian motifs and principles of decoration were rarely transferred to Santiniketan batiks. The majority of these fabrics follow the aesthetic style of Kala Bhavana, focused largely on the spiritual relationship between humans and nature. Floral motifs are frequent, as well as small animals, birds, and fish presented in harmonious, well-balanced compositions.[31]

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[28] Haimanti Chakravarty, *Batik. Decoration on Fabric as Practised in Java and South India* (Santiniketan: The Santiniketan Press, n.d.), 1.

[29] Author's research at the Nandan Kala Bhavana Museum in October 2016. Archival photographs indicate that Rabindranath Tagore also had a private collection of batiks that did not enter Kala Bhavana Nandan Museum.

[30] Interviews with Kala Bhavana graduates conducted at Santiniketan in 2016.

[31] Wronska-Friend, *Jawa Batik bagi Dunia*, 157–66.

Achal, the decorated end panel of a silk batik sari. Made by Sulekha Bhattacharya, Santiniketan, 2012.

Almost a century since its introduction to Santiniketan, the Javanese technique has received a new identity and become a distinctive feature of Bengali arts and crafts. In addition to the production of exclusive textiles such as silk saris by a group of Kala Bhavana graduates, a significant cottage industry has developed to provide employment to local women, especially from rural areas and disadvantaged families. Graduates of Kala Bhavana have also been instrumental in promoting the batik technique in other parts of India and abroad, for example in Burma.

Today Bengali batik remains the most significant legacy of Tagore's visit to Java, a tangible outcome of his efforts to revive cultural dialogue between India and Indonesia.

Australia

In a rather unusual cross-cultural encounter, in the early 1970s batik was embraced by the Aboriginal communities of the central desert in Australia. In a short time the new textile technique gained significant popularity, widely accepted as a new medium to reinterpret ancient spiritual traditions and make them available to a wider audience.

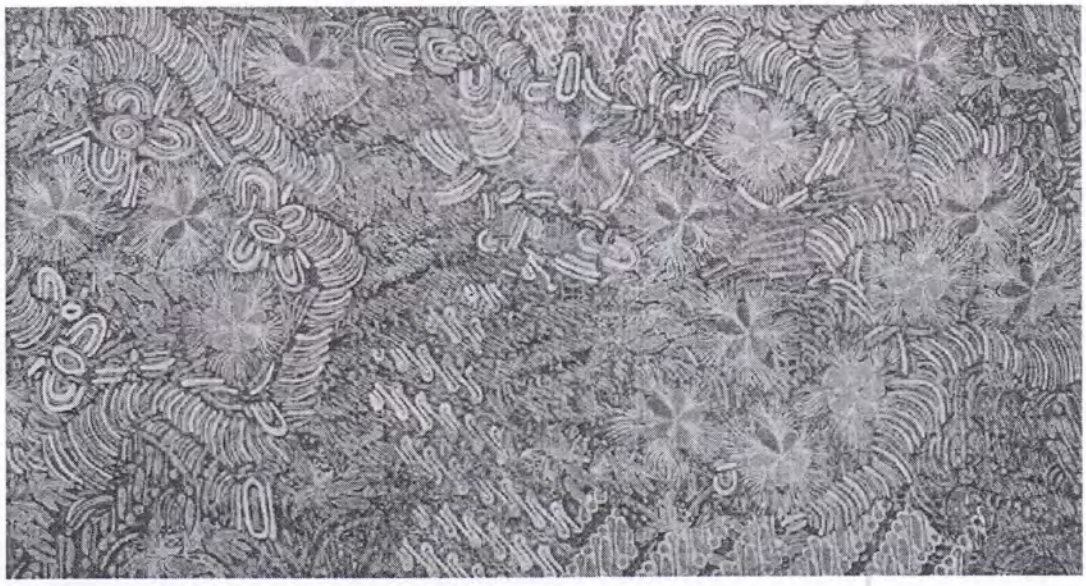
The first Aboriginal community to embrace batik was Ernabella, a small settlement of the Anangu people in the Musgrave Ranges of Central Australia. In 1971 the coordinator of the local Art Centre, Winifred Hilliard, decided to introduce batik to widen the scope of techniques used by Anangu women. The first batik instructors were American artist Leo Brereton and Danish artist Vivianne Bertelsen. Both had acquired their batik skills on Java, so the Anangu women learned the technique as it was practiced in Indonesia, using original tools imported from that country. In 1975 direct contact with Indonesia was established when three Ernabella women went to Yogyakarta to enhance their skills at the Batik Research Institute.[32] Although the Indonesian way of learning the batik technique by copying Javanese designs was contrary to the intuitive approach to batik developed at Ernabella, the visit left a lasting impression on the style of the locally produced batiks, especially on surface design: whereas previously large, flowing motifs were placed against an empty background, following the visit to Indonesia almost all Ernabella batiks featured a background densely covered with small "fill-in" motifs of points and dots similar to the Javanese *isen*.[33]

However, at Utopia, another Aboriginal community of the central desert, batik was embraced in a different way. At its peak, around 1988, batik was practiced there by around 90 women

[32] David Kaus, *Ernabella Batiks in the Hilliard Collection of the National Museum of Australia* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2004), 20–31.

[33] Wronska-Friend, *Jawa Batik bagi Dunia*, 186–90.

under Emily Kame Kngwarreye, an elderly woman of great charisma who assumed the role of "batik boss."[34] While batik motifs at Ernabella were purely decorative, without any narrative qualities or encoded meanings, at Utopia they were often associated with traditional cosmology or rituals, with the wax drawings depicting the ancestral landscape of the Dreamings. This concept paralleled the portrayal of the sacred landscape in the *semen* design of Javanese batik, represented through a range of cosmic symbols originating in the Hindu-Javanese tradition. Violet Apetyarr, one of the Utopia women who in 1994 spent several weeks improving her batik skills at the Brahma Tirta Sari studio in Yogyakarta, commented on the spiritual commonalities of Javanese and Aboriginal batiks in the following way: "Our things have Law and theirs are the same; they have Law as well. Theirs comes from the land, and ours comes from the land as well. Everybody comes and gathers together for ceremony. People come from all over the place. In the same way, we are getting to make batik."[35]



Tarian Terakhir/Last Dance (detail), a collaborative work by artists of the Brahma Tirta Sari batik studio and Aboriginal women of Utopia Urapuntja. Hand-drawn and stamped resist (*batik tulis* and *batik cap*) on silk, Yogyakarta/Utopia, 2005. Collection of Brahma Tirta Sari.

The direct contacts between Aboriginal and Javanese artists were due largely to the initiative of Nia Fliam and Agus Ismoyo of the Brahma Tirta Sari studio in Yogyakarta, renowned for a range of innovative batik textiles created in the spiritual traditions of the Javanese philosophy of *kejawen*. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed several workshops and collaborative projects: groups of Aboriginal women from Ernabella and Utopia came to Yogyakarta, and Indonesian artists visited communities of the Central Desert. The most successful outcome of the collaboration was the joint presentation of a series of monumental batik fabrics at the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane in 1999, created by the artists from Utopia and Brahma Tirta Sari. The fabrics illustrated conjoined mythological narratives of the Javanese and Aboriginal peoples by referring to

[34] Anne Marie Brody, *Utopia. A Picture Story. 88 Silk Batiks from the Robert Holmes á Court Collection* (Perth: Heytesbury Holdings Ltd., 1990).

[35] Mary-Lou Nugent, *Putting in the Colour. Contemporary Aboriginal Textiles*, (Alice Springs: Jukurrpa Books, 2001), 69.

their ancient spiritual traditions and ancestral stories. The largest of this series was a ten-meter-long batik cloth with the joint name *Sekar Pucung/Songs of the Ancestors*.[36]

In the 1990s Australian Aboriginal batik reached the peak of its popularity, becoming a well recognised, modern expression of Aboriginal culture. Apart from Ernabella and Utopia, batik was made at Fregon, Kintore, and Yuendumu.[37] The technique was practiced mainly by women, and it helped to present their cultural traditions in the context of modern Australian society. Aboriginal batiks featured at a number of exhibitions in Australia and overseas, including the 1994 display of Ernabella batiks at the National Museum of Indonesia.

However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century Aboriginal batik started to lose its artistic significance, ceding its place to the market demand for acrylic paintings. In most cases the production of batik requires a higher degree of skill and is more time-consuming than direct painting on canvas; nevertheless, fabrics fetch a much lower price and are more difficult to sell. The difficulties in appreciating textiles as a fine art meant that a number of excellent Aboriginal batik practitioners moved to painting on canvas, which is commercially more viable. Although the three-month Utopia Batik Revival Workshop of 2007 briefly renewed interest in this technique, the chapter of Australian Aboriginal batik might have come to a close.

Conclusions

Since the end of the nineteenth century batik of Java—a deeply-rooted, local textile tradition—has evolved into a pan-global technique of textile decoration providing creative stimulus for artists, artisans, and textile designers across the world. Apart from the technique and technology of dyeing, Javanese textiles have left their imprint on the iconography and surface decoration of diverse groups of textiles, in fashion and decorative arts. In each case, the mechanism of cross-cultural adaptation of the Javanese technique and its aesthetics was different. At times, for example in the case of Africa or the initial period in Japan, it was an outcome of colonial mediation and trade, while in the cases of India and Australia direct contacts between artists and craftspeople from both countries were of major significance.

The diversity of responses to the Javanese medium of batik illustrates the extent to which technology is culturally determined. New interpretations of the Javanese technique have been shaped by a range of factors such as the technological knowledge and technical constraints of the societies that adopted this method of textile decoration, their aesthetic preferences and cultural stereotypes, as well as market demand and commercial profitability. The global success of batik was largely due to the flexibility and expressive potential of this technique. While encouraging experimentation and creativity, batik allows a great degree of personal expression and easily accommodates diverse aesthetic traditions and approaches to art.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Javanese batik has left a significant legacy in textile arts in almost all parts of the world. This is a dynamic, ever-evolving process; and in the future further chapters documenting encounters of Javanese batik with new traditions will undoubtedly be written.

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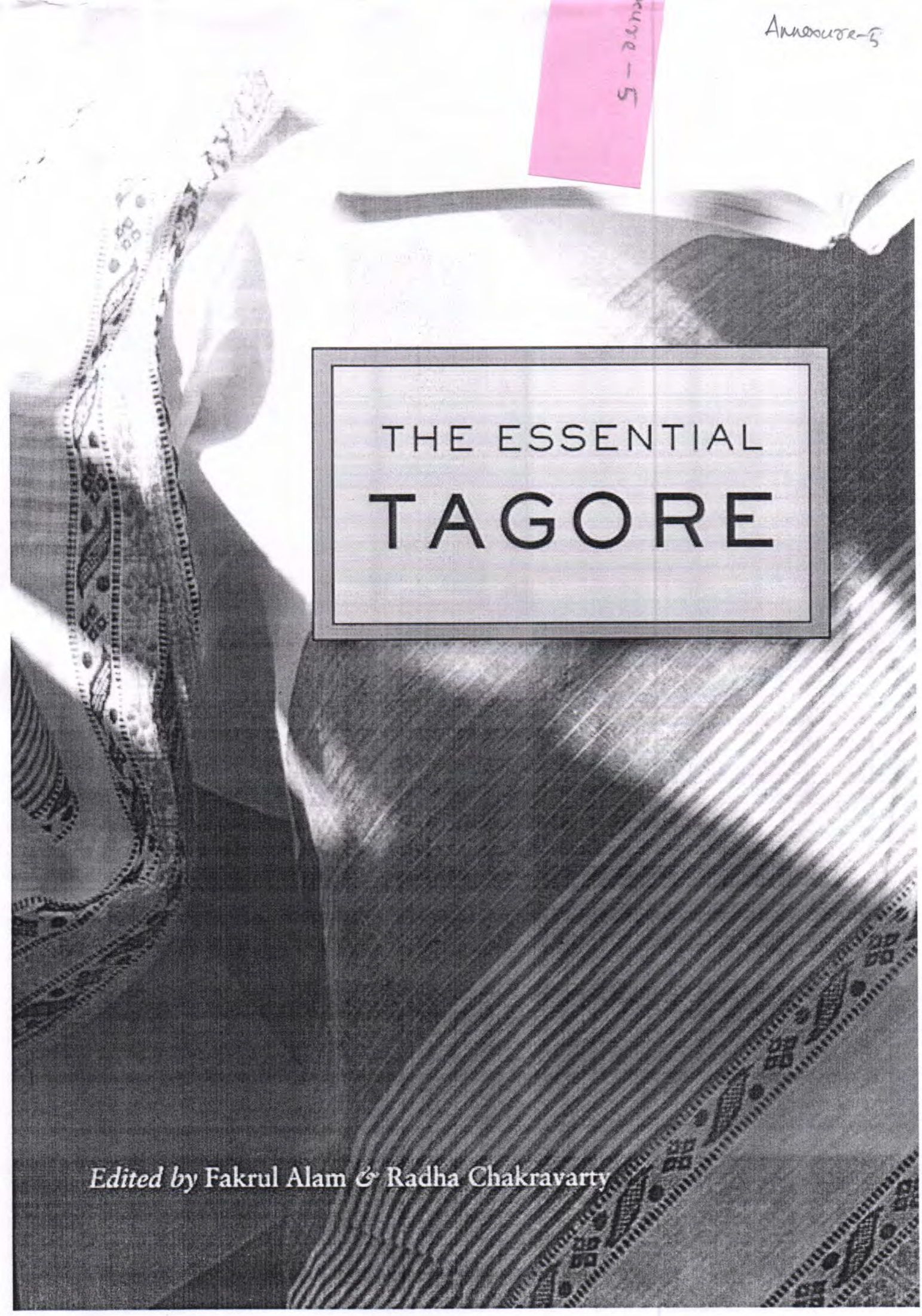
Annexure-5



THE ESSENTIAL TAGORE

Edited by Fakrul Alam & Radha Chakravarty

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RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Edited by
Fakrul Alam & Radha Chakravarty

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Courtesy Abdul Mannan.

FOREWORD

Poetry as Polemic

Whatever the unborn and the dead may know, they cannot know the beauty, the marvel of being alive in the flesh.

D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*

I BEGAN TO FEEL PUT OFF by Tagore in my late teens, around the time I discovered Indian classical music, the devotional songs of Meerabai, Tulsidas, and Kabir, not to speak of the work of the modernists. I was also—to place the moment further in context—reading contemporary European poetry in translation, in the tremendous series edited by Al Alvarez, the Penguin Modern European Poets. My father knew of my promiscuous adventurousness when it came to poetry, and, in tender deference to this, he (a corporate man) would buy these books from bookshops in the five-star hotels he frequented, such as the mythic Nalanda at the Taj. Among the poets I discovered through this route of privilege was the Israeli Dan Pagis, of whom the blurb stated: "A survivor of a concentration camp, Dan Pagis possesses a vision which is essentially tragic." I don't recall how my seventeen-year-old self responded to Pagis, but I do remember the poem he is most famous for, "Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car." Here it is in its entirety:

here in this carload
i am eve
with abel my son
if you see my other son

cain son of man
tell him i

The resonance of the poem escaped me at the time: this history was not mine. What struck me were the qualities I found most attractive when I was seventeen—metaphysical despair; deliberate irresolution. I mention the poem because I think it figured as a subtext to a difference of opinion I had with my uncle when my parents and I visited him in London in 1979. My uncle, a bachelor and an executive in shipping, was the most shameless propagandist for Tagore I have ever met, and his enthusiasm only furthered my dislike for the Bengali poet. Walking around Belsize Park, he would tell me that Tagore was the greatest poet the world had ever seen, surpassing everybody, including "the poets of the *Bhagavad Gita.*" (Homer and Shakespeare didn't even merit a mention.) I countered with the name of my favorite poet, T. S. Eliot, flag-bearer of a certain kind of twentieth-century despondency especially attractive to teenagers, and spoke too of Meera's devotionals, saying I preferred the latter to Tagore's lyrics. "You somehow feel," I said, "that there's a real urgency and immediacy about her songs. They could have been scribbled upon a prison wall." I was probably invoking Pagis here, and also having a go at Tagore's premeditated and loving craftsmanship. Many poets—besides, of course, philosophers—have insisted that there are things that are more important than poetry, especially in the face of trauma; for poets, this disavowal is, in fact, a respectable literary strategy. Even an adolescent detractor could tell that, to Tagore, *nothing* was as important as poetry.

My uncle attempted to indoctrinate me each time I went to London in the 1970s. In his eyes, Tagore was an amazingly contradictory agglomeration of virtues and characteristics. "If Tolstoy was a sage whose heart bled for mankind," said my uncle, "then Rabi Thakur was a greater sage. No one has felt more pity for man's sorrows." He spoke of him in the semifamiliar, affectionate way of the Bengali *bhadralok,* as if Tagore were a cherished acquaintance—"Rabi Thakur"—and not hieratically, as "Gurudev," the appellation Gandhi had conferred on him (as, in turn, Tagore had reportedly conferred "Mahatma" on Gandhi). He sometimes hummed Tagore's more popular and plangent lines ("My days wouldn't

remain in the golden cage / those many-coloured days of mine" and "I know, I know that the prayers that went / unanswered in life haven't been lost") mainly to express his sadness: for he was a man who loved company, and family, but had oddly chosen to be alone, and an expatriate. Then, the mood would change abruptly. Tagore, according to my uncle, was a "tennis player"—this odd metaphor was deployed to suggest, I think, a series of departures: the breaking away of Tagore's family, starting with his great-grandfather Nilmoni Tagore, from its conservative Brahminical roots; Tagore's own breaking out from his "aristocratic," landed past into modernity, art, individualism, and, of course, glamorous mystique. The latter, presumably, is what Tagore, the celebrity poet, and the tennis player had in common—besides finesse and control.

My uncle was as much in awe of Tagore's looks as he was of his work—both were, in fact, impossible to disentangle from one another. Despite his immemorial, world-denying air from his forties onward, Tagore and everything associated with him—his handwriting; the interiors he inhabited, with their new "ethnic" design; the habitations he constructed for himself in Santiniketan; the paintings created out of manuscript corrections—had an air of provisionality and experiment. They emanated from a man taking his cue from, or experiencing resonances with, a number of sources and excitements—tribal arts and crafts; the devotional-mystic music of Bengal; the dance traditions of neighboring regions, like Manipur; Shelley; the *Upanishads;* Paul Klee. All this translated, in the public domain, into the personality and the appearance themselves—the commanding but ineffable, and somehow wholly contemporary, presence of the "world poet." It was this image that held my uncle in thrall. "'People who compare me with Shakespeare should realize that I had to make a leap of five hundred years to write as I do,' said Rabindranath," reported my uncle calmly. There was a remonstrative edge to his words, though, for his identification with Tagore was fierce. "All men who repeat one line of Shakespeare *are* William Shakespeare," said Jorge Luis Borges; all Bengalis of a certain generation were, at one point or another, Tagore. And, of course, there are many Tagores, as you will discover in this volume. The phrase *renaissance man* does not capture the restless energy and vitality with which he—a colonial subject—jour-

neyed toward different genres in the manner of one learning, mastering, and finally altering new languages. He undertook each genre as an exploration: the revealing (in all kinds of ways) letter-writing of the young man; the shadowy microcosm contained in the plays; the great novels and stories; the often deeply original but underrated essays; the paintings that emerged almost by accident—from manuscript corrections—when he was a much older man. The act of journeying and the element of chance were (as I discovered later) both crucial to Tagore.

For the versatility I've just mentioned, Tagore is occasionally compared to Goethe. I see him as being closer to another German, Josef Beuys, as someone who wants not only to address or to influence the world around him, but to rearrange and reorder it—creatively, radically, sometimes physically. As a consequence, Tagore was interested not only in literature but in book design, apparel, and the decorative and cultural aspects of our drawing rooms. Indeed, Buddhadeva Bose, writing about a visit to the Tagore household, mentions how subtly innovative and experimental (and finely judged) both the food and the decor were. Tagore's urge to experiment was relentless; and we can't really pretend that what he did within the covers of a book and what he did outside it emerge from two wholly divergent impulses. Beuys refuses to distinguish between the text and the world that is his immediate material and, in many ways, dissolves the frame around the artwork; Tagore, too, frequently refuses to make the same distinction. This volume's songs, poems, stories, extracts from his novels, reflections on literature and politics and on his frequent and exhausting travels, and even instances of his sui generis humor shouldn't be read as his "writings" alone, but seen in conjunction with Tagore's larger interest—evident in almost all he did—in intervening in and reshaping his surroundings. His school, Santiniketan, served as a hothouse and a laboratory for this creative experiment. In important ways, Santiniketan—indeed, the many-pronged, all-embracing Tagorean project—was a precursor to Beuys's vision of "total art" and "social sculpture," and a successor to the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk,* the art-performance in which every form of art is incorporated. Yet Tagore's impulse needs to be distinguished from Wagner's messianic vision.

Tagore was absorbed in the everyday, the domestic, and his modernist love of the momentary.

Naturally, my uncle had a view on Tagore's metamorphic effect: "Let's say you were to set a murder mystery in the early twentieth century, and the murder had been committed by someone who grew up before Tagore became famous. Let's say a manuscript page was the single available clue. You'd catch the murderer just by looking at the handwriting, because Bengali handwriting changed forever after Tagore." Moreover, "Words like *Keatsian* and *Wordsworthian* describe a literary style associated with that particular poet," he pointed out, for he had read a great deal. "Only *Rabindrik*"—the Bengali adjective derived from Tagore's first name—"encompasses an entire generation, an outlook, that came into being with the poet's work." For my uncle, this was a matter of intransigent pride. For the very original poets who followed Tagore in the Bengali language, the legacy was a mixed one. "It was impossible to write like Rabindranath, and it was impossible not to write like Rabindranath," said Buddhadeva Bose. When, in fact, I quoted and cited the great post-Tagorean poets I particularly loved, like Jibanananda Das or Bose, to my uncle, he was completely immune to their music: "I've heard it all before. Don't you see none of this would be possible without Rabindranath?" Thus my uncle, an idiosyncratic but sensitive reader, deliberately echoed a vulgar undertone of a particular form of Bengali romanticism—that Tagore was a historical pinnacle, after which everything was a kind of decline, and every writer a latecomer. This view precluded any further fruitful discussion between my uncle and myself, though that didn't stop either of us.

There was another dimension to these conversations in London. My uncle knew, as I think I must have, that the dismantling of Tagore's reputation as a serious poet had started early—soon after the Nobel Prize in 1913—and that, by the seventies, very little survived of that reputation in the West, or, for that matter, anywhere outside the cocoon of Bengal. The rise itself had been at once astonishing and suspect, impossible without the interconnectedness of the world from the nineteenth century onward, and points to the dangers and benefits of the sort of global fame

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cial, companionable thing. It is fairly certain, though, that *sahitya*, as we understand it, is not a timeless Indian verity (for that, we should perhaps look up the word *kavya*) but a contingent, humanist construct, just as "Indianness" and the modern Bengali language are. It is also certain that the emergence of Bengali encompassed more than nationalism. It became—in lieu of English—a respectable vehicle for cosmopolitan self-expression by the 1860s. It is the latter development that failed in Ireland and Wales with regard to Gaelic and Welsh, and nationalism alone (of which there was no shortage in Ireland) didn't succeed in turning those languages into viable literatures or prevent them from becoming, essentially, curios. In Ireland, it is the English language that became the medium through which the modern formulated his or her ambivalence and self-division, so giving Irish literature and diction its shifting registers in English. Gaelic, largely associated with identity and nation, became, with a few striking exceptions, an unusable artifact. Something quite different and exceptional happened in Bengali colonial modernity. The Bengali language emerged from not only a conviction about identity but an intimation of distance, from not just the wellspring of race but disjunction and severance. These essentially cosmopolitan tensions always animate Tagore's language.

I used the word *curio* deliberately, in order to recall Buddhadeva Bose's unfair but revealing attack on Indian poets writing in English in the 1960s, in which he accused them of producing, by choosing not to write in the mother-tongue, not poems but "curios." In one sense, Bose is right. It is the English language that has risked becoming, over and over, a sort of Gaelic in India: not because, as Bose would have it, it was a foreign or colonial tongue, but because, like Gaelic, it bore too notionally the burden of identity and nationality. The relative and paradoxical freedom from this burden in the emergence of modern Bengali gave it its special air of play and potential. In other, fundamental ways, Bose was wrong. The poets he attacked had based their achievement on a cunning with which they had sabotaged and complicated the possibility of a pan-Indian tradition; they too were writing, in their way, in a vernacular. In fact, it was the long poem that Bose held up as the great exemplary Indian English poem, *Savitri* by Sri Aurobindo, that the shrewd Nissim

Ezekiel pointed out as the actual curio for, presumably, its faux high cultural atmosphere of the Orient as well as its emulation of the English canon (it was composed in iambs). It should be pointed out that Tagore's English translation of *Gitanjali* would be—for Indian poets writing in English like Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra—yet another Gaelic artifact to bypass or circumvent. In his brief memoir "Partial Recall," Mehrotra quotes, with little indulgence toward his youthful self, from the ambitious and sonorous pastiche of that *Gitanjali* which he produced as a teenager.

The fact that Literature—specifically English Literature—was a university discipline first invented for the colonies is fairly well-known today. In the 1880s, English Literature became an object of study leading to a degree at the University of Calcutta, well before any such development had taken place elsewhere, let alone Oxford or Cambridge. But the incursion of English and European literary texts into Bengal had begun a century earlier. The study of literature cannot be seen simply as an instrument of imperialist pedagogy from 1820s onward (when it first surfaces as a taught discipline in Calcutta). By the early nineteenth century, Bengalis, especially when naming literary and cultural societies, were reflecting on what literature, or, in Bengali, *sahitya,* might be—great texts of all kinds, or a different way of approaching and valuing texts? A significant historical narrative is contained in the evolution of the word *sahitya* into its present-day meaning. What seems pretty sure is that it was not a word just lying around, ready to slip into its contemporary, secular role. Nor is it a simple translation of the word *literature,* though it means much the same thing from the middle of the nineteenth century onward. That is, it is neither a purely Indian (whatever that may be) or colonial term, but one that keeps abreast of these dichotomies until they start to waver. Tagore, in his first essay on the subject in 1889, defines it in negatives: "The essence of literature does not allow itself to be trapped within a definition. It is like the essence of life: we know what it cannot exist without, but what it is we do not know." These are the words of a poet

who has come into his own at a cusp in history. Perhaps the specificity of Tagore's problem, and the duress of the historical moment he's speaking in and of, would become clearer if the key word were left untranslated: "The essence of *sahitya* does not allow itself to be trapped," and so on. But the translator, Sukanta Chaudhuri, doesn't do so because he presumes Tagore has already leaped toward the sense in which that word operates today; and, in part, he's right. By 1889, Tagore's readers have definitely begun to recognize the literary, in spite of the strangeness of the sentences I have quoted. Yet one must keep in mind the strangeness of the time. Tagore's complex and difficult position as a modern Indian, a colonial subject, an elite cosmopolitan, an inheritor and inventor of Eastern civilizational values, and a progeny of the Enlightenment allows him to partake of the exclusive secular ethos of literature but also to view it from the outside, as a process. You feel more than once as you gaze back on that crucial period that you are over-familiar with its outlines, and also that you are only on the verge of understanding it.

Tagore has been such a fountainhead of nationalist pride, such a static emblem ever since one can remember that we forget that he was clearly aware, as a writer, of living in a unique and transformative time. There is, in Tagore, a constant acknowledgment of the power of the past, and of the canonical riches of Indian tradition, and constant inquiry about the terms in which these are available to us. In this, he is different from either the Hindu reformers or the Indian nationalists, for whom tradition has an integrity and wholeness, and is a given to be improved upon or invoked in the services of politics and identity. For Tagore, tradition is at once contemporary and immediate, and inaccessible and disjunctive. As a result, contrary emotions permeate his great essay on the fourth-century Kalidasa's poem on the rainy season, *Meghadutam* (*The Cloud-Messenger*):

> From Ramgiri to the Himalayas ran a long stretch of ancient India over which life used to flow to the slow, measured mandra-

> kanta metre of the *Meghadutam*. We are banished from that India, not just during the rains but for all time. Gone is Dasharna with its groves hedged with ketaki plants where, before the onset of the rains, the birds among the roadside trees fed on household scraps and busily built their nests, while in the jaam copse on the outskirts of the village, the fruit ripened to a colour dark as the clouds.

The intimation of contemporaneity here is astonishingly suburban; it has to do with nature, yes, but nature viewed from the point of view of the town and the ebb and flow of domesticity: the "household scraps" the birds feed on, the ripening jaam that will be collected and brought home to the family. Kalidasa is not a naïve poet; he is a court sophisticate, an urban sensibility, already viewing the natural at one remove. The loss experienced here, then—"We are banished from that India, not just during the rains but for all time"—is a double, even a multiple, one. From which India, exactly, are we banished? This paradox—to do with immediacy, recognizability, and absolute inaccessibility—is also the subject of Tagore's own poem, *Meghdut,* which records the experience of rereading Kalidasa's eponymous poem. Tagore's poem, filled with images of human activity and habitation, describes how the reader comes to inhabit Kalidasa's world as he reads and becomes an exile from it once the poem is over.

Tagore's fascination and absorption in heritage could have made him an elegist, or a poet who turned from the physical life of the present to contemplate the ruins of the past. This trajectory was, to a certain extent, T. S. Eliot's. But, oddly, this is not the case. Tagore's way of suggesting that he lives in a unique moment in history is to embrace change as a fundamental constituent of existence—indeed, as a crucial constituent of diction, imagination, and craft. "In order to find you anew, I lose you every moment/ O beloved treasure." In this line from a song and others like it, Tagore embraces accident. He weds contingency to the modernist's love of the moment, the here and now. The latter—as in the Joycean epiphany—heightens the quotidian: Tagore's welcoming of contingency introduces an element of risk to the epiphany and the image. He intro-

duces the possibility of *any* imaginable consequence, including an intuition of the divine. Tagore's apotheosis of his historical moment, his here and now, is not a surreptitious celebration of the colonial history into which he was born, but a recognition of the fact that no historical period can be contained within its canonical definition. Accident and chance ensure that its outcomes are unpredictable and life-transforming.

This embrace of life, of chance, of play, makes Tagore stand out in the intellectual and moral ethos of late romanticism and modernism—an ethos with which Tagore shares several obsessions (time, memory, the moment, the nature of reality, poetic form), but whose metaphysics he constantly refutes. By *metaphysics* I mean a system whereby value and meaning have their source elsewhere, somewhere beyond the experienced world—whether it is European civilization, antiquity, the Celtic twilight, or some other lost world. The present, severed from its organic resources in that past, becomes degraded and splintered, and yet continues to be haunted, even burnished, by what it has lost. I think Tagore is deeply interested in this metaphysics in the context of Bengal, and it runs through his songs, with their momentary scenes, encounters, and revelations, where any hint of transcendence is qualified by the temporal and the fragmentary. This metaphysics is partly invoked as incantation in the refrain from the poem *"Balaka,"* or "The Wild Geese": *"Hethha noi, hethha noi, onno konokhane!"* ("Not here, not here—elsewhere!") But there is also—in the same oeuvre, often in the very same songs and poems—the Tagore of whom I have become more and more aware, the near-contemporary of Nietzsche's, who, like the latter, makes a break with that "elsewhere" and constructs a sustained argument against it in song, and in the terms that life and desire give him: "I've become infinite: / such is the consequence of your play. / Pouring me out, you fill me / with new life once again." This, in many ways, is an astonishing and audacious assertion, all the more striking for being entirely self-aware about its audacity (this is a tonal characteristic Tagore shares with Nietzsche). The oeuvre is full of such assertions, running counter to both romanticism's backward glance and his own "Not here, not here" refrain. It marks him out, like D. H. Lawrence, as a writer embodying a radical historical break. The lines I have tried to reproduce in English are among the most

difficult to translate from the work of this largely untranslatable poet. They (in Tagore's own English) are also among his most famous, being the opening lines of the first song in the English *Gitanjali.* In Tagore's English prose-poem version: "Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure." All sorts of echoes adorn the next two lines in Tagore's English—"This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again . . ." and "This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales"—placing the song now in the context of a psalmlike, New Testament sweetness ("this frail vessel") and now in an English arcadia ("little flute of a reed . . . hills and dales"). The words are removed, in effect, from the radical moment they inhabit in the Bengali. The original—*"Amare tumi ashesh korechho/emoni leela taba"*—is remarkable, as I've said, on many levels. The word *leela* can be translated as divine play: Hindu philosophy sees divine play as childlike and solipsistic, and the creation and destruction of the universe, and of man, among its various corollaries. Tagore translates the word as "pleasure," to denote the primacy of delight and desire, rather than moral design, in divine creation. Among the unintended, almost inadvertent, results of that play, the song has it, is man's immortality, or "infinity" (my word), or "endlessness" (Tagore's). And so the centrality of the human is bestowed upon her or him by divinity, certainly, but not by design or according to a legible purpose. In this way, Tagore introduces the notion of chance and coincidence into the story of man's emergence, and removes the human narrative from its familiar logical movement (an ascent or a decline) from the past to the present, from tradition to modernity.

Radical claims abound in the songs and poems. Also in the *Gitanjali* is the song beginning (in my translation): "To the festival of creation I have had an invitation: / Blessed, blessed is human life!" In Tagore's English prose-poem, though, the song's declaration is more modest: "I have had my invitation to this world's festival, and thus my life has been blessed." This is almost Christian, a muttering of grace. The Bengali is far more unsettling: it has "human life" *(manab jiban)* instead of the prayerful "my life." It is more triumphal. Again, alongside the celebration of the occurrence of life and consciousness is the deliberate celebration of contingency. An invitation is always a bonus and a gift; you can't really

expect it or plan for it or demand it. And, once more, the two lines, with their narrative of cause and effect, are structured at once to invoke logic and to mock it. In the earlier song, Tagore writes as if he knows that the self's infinity or endlessness should be a natural consequence of divine play, while also knowing very well there is absolutely no logical reason for the one to lead to the other. In the second song, the progression, from discovering the invitation to the festival of existence to the assertion that human life is "blessed" *(dhanya),* is presented seamlessly, although we know there is actually no good reason why the second should follow from the first. (In the English version, which adds a "thus" that is absent in the Bengali, the progression in the first line is far more acceptable.) But why should divine play lead to the speaker's belief in his own infinitude? Why should his being invited to earthly existence be a cause of joy for all human life? There's a logical structure to the way these statements develop, but it is a structure that conceals a deep arbitrariness. The second song strongly implies, in its movement from the first line to the second in Bengali, a "thus" or "therefore" or *"tai,"* without being able to quite justify or explain that powerful implication. The English translation, by adding a "thus" and substituting "human life" with "my life," simply dispenses with that mysterious tension and diminishes the audacity of the opening. We, as listeners of the Bengali song, are moved and unsettled, but we ask, in the end, for no justification: it is almost as if we know that, in Tagore's world, anything is possible.

Much of Tagore's work, then, is preoccupied with—indeed, mesmerized by—coincidence and possibility. It is a preoccupation that seems to go against the closure and yearning of "Not here, not here, elsewhere," because one can never predict when or where that moment of possibility will occur. One of the songs I have translated for this volume, "The sky full of the sun and stars, the world full of life, / in the midst of this, I find myself— / so, surprised, my song awakens," is, again, a paean to coincidence. It is also a refutation of metaphysics, of a higher purpose (whatever that might be), according to whose design existence or consciousness might find its proper meaning and arrangement. I have translated Tagore's word *bismaye* as "surprised," though it could plausibly be rendered as "in wonder." The role of the naïve or nature poet, or even a cer-

tain kind of romantic, is to wonder at the real, at the universe, but the speaker in the song is not just transfixed by the beauty of the universe but by the happenstance that's brought him to it: "in the midst of this, I find myself." This is what gives to the poet-mystic's *bismay* (his sense of wonder) the element of the unexpected, of surprise—the surprise of the time-traveler (expressed in the poem *Meghdut*) moving between worlds and phases of history. Tagore's peculiar lyric voice, with its curiously urgent apotheosis of the world, its constant note of arrival, can be partly understood through the trope of science fiction (one of whose recurrent themes is the sudden advent into new universes), or through the notion of rebirth and return, or both. This is an odd but powerful, and revealing, characteristic in the foremost artist to have emerged from a background of Brahmo reformism and the Bengali Enlightenment.

Tagore's recurrent metaphors of time-travel, return, and arrival, and the fact that the great protagonist of his songs and poems is a figure determinedly committed to journeying toward life and birth, were picked up by two great Bengali artists who came after him: the poet Jibanananda Das and the filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak. Das (1899–1954), who, after his untimely death in an accident with a tram, has come to be seen as the outstanding Bengali poet after Tagore, and whose personality—solitary, disturbed—is the antithesis of the older poet's, sensed that Tagore was the principal writer of his time of the will to, and desire for, life. Without remarking upon this in so many words, he took on this mantle himself, but expressed himself far more equivocally, if no less forcefully. Das's time-traveler, in his poem "Banalata Sen," moves through epochs and civilizations, arriving at last in a modern drawing room in Bengal, in a journey during which both mythic and ordinary place-names are made strange:

> For thousands of years I roamed the paths of this earth,
> From waters round Ceylon in dead of night to Malayan seas.
> Much have I wandered. I was there in the gray world of Asoka

> And Bimbisara, pressed on through darkness to the city of
> Vidarbha.
> I am a weary heart surrounded by life's frothy ocean.
> To me she gave a moment's peace—Banalata Sen from Natore.
> *(trans. Clinton B. Seely)*

The irrepressible Tagorean energy, the irresistible will to arrive—"in the midst of this, I find myself—/ so, surprised, my song awakens"—has faded here but not vanished. Das gets his habit of repeating ancient place names from Tagore as one of the ways in which the traveler orders his journey while commemorating past arrivals; here is Tagore in his eponymous essay on Kalidasa's poem, "The *Meghadutam*": "Avanti, Vidisha, Ujjayini, Vindhya, Kailas, Devagiri, the Reva, the Shipra, the Vetravati." But Das's speaker experiences a fatigue that the radical Tagorean protagonist didn't know. Das's hero, or antihero, must press on, despite his "weary heart": he has inherited, perplexingly, the same life-urge. Das too is a great poet of the will to live—precisely because his view of it is darker, and far more qualified. His protagonist desires to be born despite being conscious that birth is not an unmixed blessing. This is Das's troubling modulation upon the Tagorean idea of the "invitation" to earthly existence, as a result of which "human life" is "blessed":

> Drawn to the Earth's ground, to the house of human birth
> I have come, and I feel, better not to have been born—
> yet having come all this I see as a deeper gain
> when I touch a body of dew in an incandescent dawn.
> (*"Suchetana," trans. Joe Winter*)

In the first two lines of this famous stanza, Das has a familiar Sophoclean moment; but, in the third and fourth lines, he's come round to the Tagorean belief that arrival and return create their own article of faith; the body becomes an incarnation of the will ("I touch a body of dew"); in Tagore's words, "I've pressed upon each blade of grass on my way to the forest." Again and again, Das will be of two minds about this matter, about withdrawing from the cycle of life or, taking his cue from his great precursor, returning to it:

When once I leave this body
Shall I come back to the world?
If only I might return
On a winter's evening
Taking on the compassionate flesh of a cold tangerine
At the bedside of some dying acquaintance.
("Tangerine," *trans. Clinton B. Seely*)

For Tagore, withdrawal was out of the question. "In the midst of this, I find myself," he'd said in the song. In the poem "Liberation" *("Mukti")*, he put it elegantly but with directness: "Liberation through renunciation—that's not for me"; and, later, "To shut / in penance, the senses' doorway—that's not for me." We can connect this to the Buddhist thought that deeply attracted Tagore; but if we place it in the context of his oeuvre, of the modernity he lived in, and the modernism he was always ambivalent about, we must put him in the lineage of Nietzsche, Whitman, Lawrence, and others who made a similar rebuttal of negation. Actually, looking again at the poem *"Balaka"* ("The Wild Geese"), in which the admonitory refrain "Not here, not here, elsewhere" occurs, I find it lit not so much by a desire for "elsewhere" (the foundational desire of metaphysics) but, again, by the subversive urge for life itself. The poet is standing after sunset before a landscape of hills and deodar trees, near the river Jhelum, when, unexpectedly, the sudden transit of a flock of geese flying transmogrifies the observer and his vision of nature. The Tagorean landscape is often orchestral, participatory, musical, synchronic, but not Wordsworthian, with the "still, sad music of humanity"; it is alive, but not in an anthropomorphic sense. In another, early poem, *"Jete nahi dibo"* ("I Won't Let You Go"), all of nature, as the speaker departs from home and family on a long absence involving work, echoes his daughter's final words to him in an actively participatory way, in what can only be called an orchestral threnody:

What immense sadness has engulfed
The entire sky and the whole world!
The farther I go the more clearly I hear
Those poignant words, "Won't let you go!"

From world's end to the blue dome of the sky
Echoes the eternal cry: "Won't let you go!"
Everything cries, "I won't let you go!"
Mother Earth too cries out to the tiny grass
It hugs on its bosom, "I won't let you go!"
(*trans. Fakrul Alam*)

This is not anthropomorphism; it is the landscape agitated by the life-urge, and making a vocal, direct intervention. In "The Wild Geese," Tagore revisits and revises his vision:

It seemed that those wings
Bore away tidings
Of stillness thrilled in its innermost being
By the intensity of motion . . .
(*trans. Fakrul Alam*)

And again:

. . . The grass fluttering its wings
On the earth that is its air—
Underneath the darkness of the soil
Millions of seeds sprouting wings
I see today

From Tagore, the filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak (1925–1976) got his sense of the landscape being not just a serene, indifferent, permanent background to human endeavor, as in the Brueghel painting of Icarus's fall described wryly by W. H. Auden in his "Musée des Beaux Arts," but as a multivocal, orchestral entity actively involved in the desire for existence. So, at different points of time in Ghatak's films, the landscape appears to move and listen; it is aware of the protagonist, just as the protagonist is partly conscious of it being conscious of him. Ghatak's great modulation upon "The Wild Geese" and its cry—as well as the cry "I won't let you go"—occurs toward the end of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (The Cloud-Covered Star), his most fraught and painful film. Nita, once the breadwinner of a family of East Bengali refugees displaced by migration, is now terminally ill with tuberculosis. She has been transferred by her brother, Shankar, from their

house in Calcutta to a sanatorium in the hill-station, Shillong. Anil, now a successful singer, comes to visit her; the two figures are surrounded by an astonishing panorama. As she listens to him talk about their younger sister's mischievous child, Nita bursts out without warning, "Dada, I *did* want to live!" Crushed, attempting to placate and silence her, Anil responds with "Idiot!" (Indeed, there is something comic, even imbecilic, about the life-urge and its insistent simplicity; which is why we, on occasion, shake our heads in consternation at Tagore and Whitman and Lawrence and Ghatak—all very different kinds of artists, admittedly.) In a series of rapid frames, we witness the landscape congregating from various angles and echoing her words, "I so love life, dada! I *will* live!" This is the primordial Tagorean "message" ("I felt the message of those beating wings") of a near-heretical faith; ironicized by Ghatak, seen unflinchingly for its heresy, but not made meaningless. This faith contains an acknowledgment of death and "elsewhere," but also an answer and a refutation.

Death and life share the quality of being contingent, accidental: we don't know when and how they will happen, or even, really, why they do. (This would have been pretty clear to Tagore, who lost his muse and sister-in-law Kadambari Devi when he was twenty-two—she had died by her own hand—and then, over the years, his wife and two of his children.) Tagore's work is less about universals, absolutes, and unities (though it *is* also about these) than about the role of chance governing the shape of the universe and of the work itself, taking the form of a sustained meditation: "In order to find you anew, I lose you every moment / O beloved treasure." Contingency preoccupied him all his life. In 1930, when he had a couple of meetings with Albert Einstein, he opened the dialogue enthusiastically with, "I was discussing with Dr. Mendel today the new mathematical discoveries which tell us that in the realm of infinitesimal atoms chance has its play; the drama of existence is not absolutely predestined in character." Einstein replies with a dampener: "The facts that make science tend toward this view do not say goodbye to causality."

This famous, over-publicized conversation can be read in a number of ways. Einstein clearly sees Tagore as a "poet" in the "high" cultural western sense, but still more as an eastern sage, and is dry and cautious as a result. He—not Tagore—keeps bringing up the word *religion* in a mildly defensive, mildly accusatory manner. Einstein, responsible for a shatteringly disorienting theory that would forever change philosophy and the humanities, not to speak of the sciences, forecloses, in response to Tagore, that strand of insight, and becomes a conventional scientist-empiricist: for "that," he says, "is my religion." Tagore, in the course of the two slightly anxious, circular conversations, appears in various fluid incarnations: as a romantic poet, talking about beauty and truth; as a transcendentalist; a believer in the absolute; a propagandist for universal man. We have dealt with him in these guises in the last one hundred years of discussions about Tagore; no doubt we will again, one hundred and fifty years after his birth. But Tagore's secret concern with life, play, and contingency keeps resurfacing in his part of the dialogue; he might well have believed that this powerful undercurrent would provide common ground with the German. Einstein, though, pushes the interaction toward a more conservative dichotomy: that of the romantic, the man of religion, or the metaphysician with his purely subjective response to the universe, on the one hand, and the scientist with his empirical and objective vantage point, on the other.

For me, there are two great lineages in poetry from the upheavals of the nineteenth century onward: the metaphysical, or the poetry of the beautiful (sometimes anguished) fragment made radiant by the light of the vanished old world and of bygone value; and the polemical, sounding the note of constant, occasionally arbitrary, arrival and return, disrupting not just linearity, as the former does, but causality. I think Tagore belongs deeply, if only partially, to the first category, and I have written before of his songs in this light. But, increasingly, I believe his great power derives from being essentially in the second camp, from denying, like Whitman and Lawrence, that there is any need to apologize for life and its acciden-

tal provenance. One characteristic of the writers in the first camp is how they practice their art and their criticism in distinct domains, and, in a sense, detach themselves from the "meaning" of their artistic work, like Joyce's fingernail-paring author-god, or James's evolving "figure in the carpet," upon which the narrator will deliberately not elaborate. The polemicists, on the other hand, not only immerse themselves in the thrust of their work with every fiber of their being—"a man in his wholeness wholly attending," as Lawrence said of poetry—but in every sphere of activity they undertake, as Tagore did. This is why they seem open to deciphering and are more vulnerable to misunderstanding.

I had begun by mentioning my adolescent impatience with Tagore and my enthusiasm for Dan Pagis's poem about the Holocaust. I still admire that poem—in fact, more than I did when I was seventeen—for its craft, tragic exactness, and its shrinking shape informed by Adorno's stark dictum that poetry is no longer tenable after Auschwitz. Adorno's admonition, however, has a history older than the horrors of the twentieth century: it comes from a metaphysical belief that, on many levels, life (and, as a result, its chief expression, language) is too fragile to wholly justify itself. Tagore is still the great poet in our age of life's inherent and inexhaustible justification—this is what he is actually conveying to Einstein—but his argument is plainest in the songs and poems. Accustomed as we are to the luminosity of elsewhere, to the backward glance, to action and outcome with a cause, and less accustomed to the joy of unforeseen arrival (which, after all, rapidly wanes into alienation), encountering Tagore has to be an unsettling experience—but one through which we also come to recognize our deepest unspoken urges and beliefs incarnated in the most surprising and incomparable language.

AMIT CHAUDHURI

ফাগুলাল

সে সকলের আগে এগিয়ে গেছে।

বিশু

কোথায় গেছে? নন্দিনী!

ফাগুলাল

সে চলে গেছে মুক্তির পথে।

বিশু

তবে আর দেরি কেন ফাগুলাল!

ফাগুলাল

বিশু ভাই, চলো।

বিশু

উনি কোথায় যাচ্ছে?

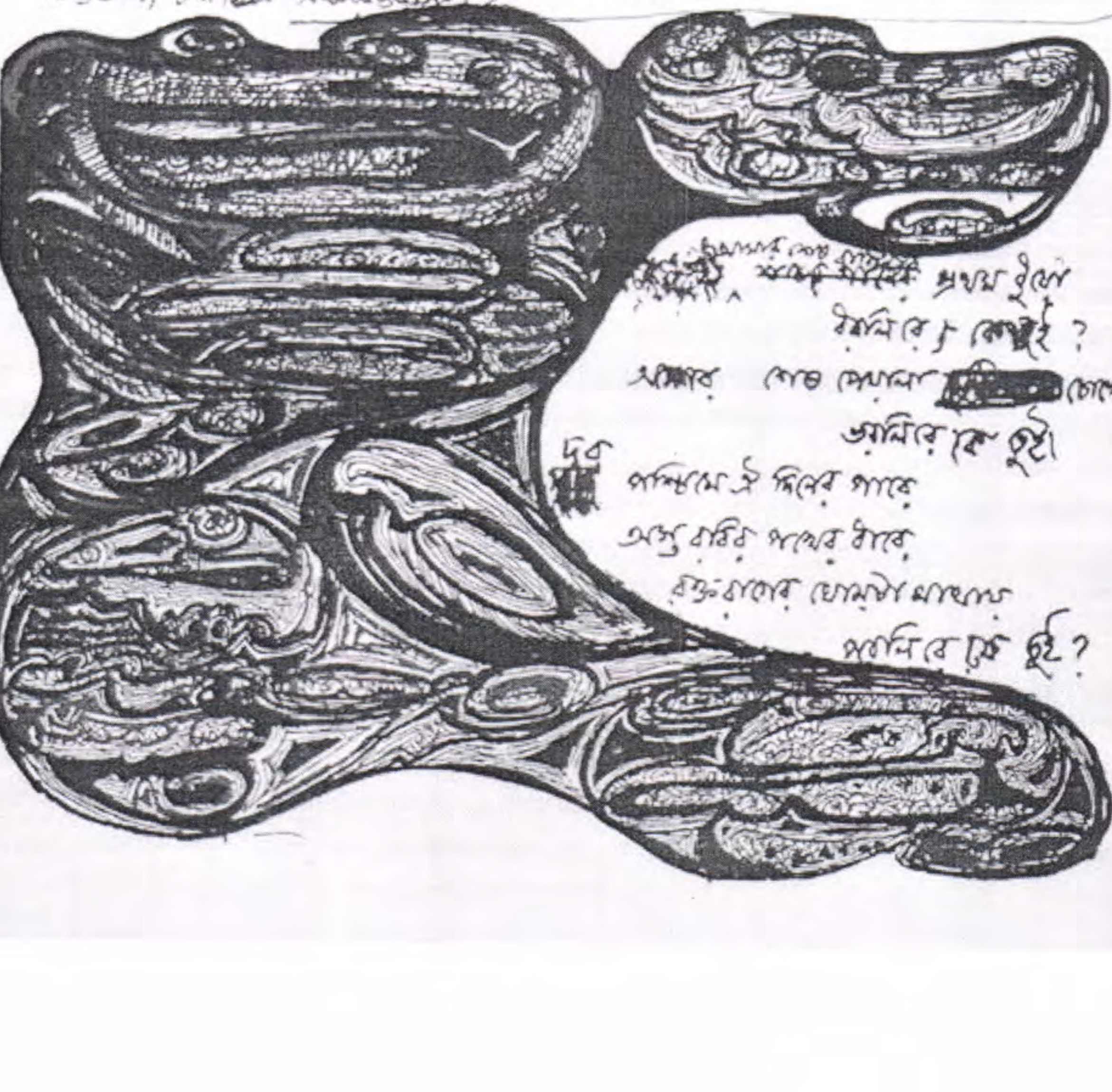
ফাগুলাল

ঐ তো সেই সর্দার [illegible] যাচ্ছে।

বিশু

এই তার শেষের দেনা। [redacted] তার বাঁশী [illegible]।

চল হবে।



[illegible] প্রথম তুমি

বাঁশরি কে বাজাই?

আমার শেষ বেলার [redacted] চোখের জল

জ্বালিয়ে কে তুই।

দূরে পশ্চিমে ঐ দিনের পারে

অস্তরবির পথের ধারে

রক্তরাগের ঘোমটা মাথায়

পালিয়ে কে তুই?

Introduction

When RABINDRANATH TAGORE passed away in 1941 he left behind thousands of pages of poetry, prose, plays, essays, letters, humorous pieces, autobiographical writings, and travel literature. An astonishing number of these works remain of interest to twenty-first century readers and highlight his importance in the contemporary world. This volume explores the essential Tagore, offering a selection of his works from the many genres with which he experimented and collecting them in one volume. In letter #92 in *Chhinnapatra (Torn Leaves)*, Tagore confesses that though poetry has been for him "a kind of secret and forbidden delight," he has also found pleasure in writing short fiction, writing "in the form of a diary or some such genre," as well as producing polemical pieces. He affirms that it is "very important to cross swords with our people on social issues," although this offers him a pleasurable dilemma: "I don't want to disappoint any of my Muses." He realizes that "in literature, my sense of duty isn't concerned with what brings the most benefit to the world, but with what I can do best." He describes his growing awareness that he not only is good at poetry but also has a talent for theater, and for composing songs and essays on controversial issues such as child marriage or differences in education. Even painting attracts him, he says, though he admits that it seems beyond his capacity when he is writing the *Chhinnapatra* letters. In short, although he apparently devoted himself to poetry, what was essential for his creative spirit was the urge to branch out in all directions.

The Essential Tagore offers a comprehensive view of Tagore's infinite variety and incomparable genius in a single volume, for it is only

when we get a broad view of Tagore's creative practice that we can begin to appreciate the extent of his achievement and understand why he remains relevant and open to reinterpretation, even as we reach his sesquicentenary year.

His Life and Works

Rabindranath Tagore was born in the Jorasanko house of the Tagores on 7 May 1861. The family had first settled down in this Kolkata house in the 1780s because of Rabindranath's great grandfather Nilmoni Tagore, who had profited like his elders from his close association with the East India Company. But the Tagore family became really prominent in the city because of Rabindranath's grandfather Dwarkanath Tagore. He was reputed to be fabulously wealthy and well connected with the East India Company. He was a leading light of the city's cultural and religious life, famous for his extravagance and his progressive ideas. A close friend of the celebrated reformer Raja Rammohon Roy, he was also associated with the reformist Brahmo Samaj and with educational initiatives such as the Hindu College. These men and some of their contemporaries initiated a movement that came to be known as the Bengal Renaissance, during which western enlightenment values and cultural texts galvanized a people seemingly bent on leading moribund lives.

Tagore's father Debendranath became the head of the family after the death of Dwarkanath. Unlike Dwarkanath, Debendranath was spiritually inclined and devoted to the austere and monotheistic Hinduism embodied in the *Upanishads.* He saw to it that the children grew up in an atmosphere that combined Bengali traditions with western culture. He also ensured that his father's excesses would not be repeated in the Jorasanko house, prescribing reformist ideas and a regime of prayers instead. Given to meditation, discipline, and frugality, he revived the family fortunes and set up a retreat in land he owned close to the little town of Bolpur, calling it Santiniketan or the place of peace. Hailed as the "Maharshi" or great sage, he also wrote a book of sermons.

Rabindranath was the youngest of Debendranath's fourteen chil-

dren. Heirs to the grandfather's reformist zeal and their father's work ethic and devotional practices, several of these children grew up and distinguished themselves through their professional and cultural attainments. Dwijendranath, the eldest of Tagore's brothers, was a poet, philosopher, and nationalist. Debendranath's second son Satyendranath, on the other hand, became somewhat Anglicized after his visit to England, where he had successfully completed his education to become the first Indian recruited to the Indian Civil Service. He was proficient in English, Sanskrit, and Bengali and wrote in all three languages. A sister, Swarnakumari, earned fame as the first Bengali female novelist. Her success indicates the impact of modernization on some upper-class Bengali Hindu women. But the brother who had the greatest influence on Rabindranath was Jyotirindranath Tagore. He painted, played different musical instruments, edited a newspaper, and produced farces and plays that he had written and translated. He ensured his siblings' participation in the productions staged in the Jorasanko house. From 1874, Tagore also took lessons in art. His early drawings, from 1874 to 1883, are preserved in the manuscript "Malati Puthi" in the Tagore Museum (Rabindra Sadan) at Santiniketan. Even after he discontinued his lessons in art, Tagore continued to experiment with sketches and doodles. In these early attempts, we can trace the origins of his later paintings, and his urge to express in the visual medium what he could not say in words.

Tagore did not get much of a formal education; he hated the mechanical teaching he had encountered in all three schools he was sent to and became a lifelong critic of joyless learning by rote. Ultimately, he was taught by his father (when he could spare the time), his older siblings, and private tutors, but took early to learning on his own. Indeed, he was often left on his own, for though his father loved the children and took the twelve-year-old Tagore along with him on a particularly memorable trip to the Himalayas and elsewhere, he was away frequently on business or in religious retreat. Tagore's mother, Sharada Devi, was also busy managing her many children and a large, bustling household. She died when Rabindranath was fourteen years old. Tagore was left with his siblings and servants to give him company when he sought it. But when Jyotirindranath married Kadambari Devi in 1868, Tagore found a companion

who was not only close to him in years but also in temperament. The two gradually became very intimate.

Growing up in a large family where so many of his siblings were involved in literary work, art, and theater, Tagore turned to writing early in life. He found stimuli for his writing in the activity in the Jorasanko house and its environs, and in his reading. He was soon recognized as a phenomenal talent by his siblings, elders, and family friends, who included him in their literary activities. He was only thirteen when he composed a verse translation of *Macbeth* and had a poem published anonymously in a local paper. In 1875, the fourteen-year-old Tagore read a patriotic poem publicly at the well-attended cultural-religious festival known as Hindu Mela and then had it published in the reputable newspaper *Amrita Bazar Patrika;* in the same year he composed his first song for Jyotirindranath's play *Sarojini* and contributed a long narrative poem called *Banaphul (The Wild Flower)* to a periodical. He was soon contributing literary criticism to magazines. In 1877 he made his stage debut, playing the lead role in Jyotirindranath's Bengali version of Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* in a production staged at Jorasanko. The next year he became a regular contributor to *Bharati,* a monthly journal edited by his eldest brother Dwijendranath with the help of Jyotirindranath. It contained poems, literary criticism, Tagore's first long story, "Bhikharini," and a novel titled *Karuna* that he did not manage to finish. But the most audacious of the precocious Tagore's literary endeavors in his sixteenth year was a cycle of poems that he eventually published under a pseudonym in 1884 as *Bhanusingha Thakurer Padavali.* Written in an archaic style, this was his attempt to do what Thomas Chatterton had done with his pseudo-medieval poems, but unlike the English poet's works, which brought him infamy, Tagore gradually welded his cleverly crafted lyrics to music, and as songs they became classics of *Rabindrasangeet.*

Tagore was blossoming as a writer in Bengali, but Debendranath had not given up on his desire to give his talented son a "proper" education. In 1878, therefore, he sent Tagore to stay for a while in Ahmedabad with his second brother Satyendranath, who was at that time the district judge of the city. The idea was to prepare Tagore for England, where he could get the schooling required to follow Satyendranath's footsteps and

eventually join the Indian Civil Service. En route, Tagore stayed for a while in Mumbai with the Anglicized family of a Marathi physician, Atmaram Dadoji Panduram. He became a close friend of their daughter Ana, later dedicating some poems to her. He then went to school in Bristol, England, where he lived with Satyendranath's wife and children, one of whom, Indira Rani Chaudhurani, became a confidante to whom he would write some of his most famous letters. Tagore was then sent to study English literature at University College London, but once again he proved temperamentally unable to stick to a formal course of studies. The trip to England, however, exposed him to contemporary British culture and led to some sparkling letters which he first published in *Bharati* and then in a book, *Europe Prabasir Patra* (1881).

Returning to India in 1880, Tagore plunged into creative work. As he said in *Boyhood Days:* "The fountain of my music now began to play" (62). The next year he composed a set of devotional songs for the Brahmo Samaj; wrote his first musical play, *Valmiki Pratibha,* and played the lead role of Valmiki, the author of the first Indian epic, *Ramayana;* published the verse play *Rudrachanda* and the long poem *Bhagnahriday;* gave his first public lecture titled "Music and Feeling" in Calcutta Medical College; and published a number of prose essays and reviews, as well as *Europe Prabasir Patra.* His writings from 1881 onward bore the imprint of his exposure to England, for he would often mingle western musical elements with Bengali forms and reveal the influence of the English Romantic and Victorian poets in his lyrics, plays, and verse narratives, even when the subjects were derived from Indian myth, legend, and history.

In 1882 Tagore helped Jyotirindranath set up Saraswat Samaj, a kind of academy of Bengali letters, which would become the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad ten years later. Such organizational activity showed a side of Tagore which became even more prominent as the years went by, for he would take the lead in transforming the course of Bengali letters in the future. There was a kind of literary nationalism at work with the Tagore brothers; they were dedicated to creating a new Bengal through their cultural activities. But this year was most memorable for a quasi-mystical experience that Tagore underwent when he was staying with Jyotirindranath and Kadambari Devi at their Kolkata house. The experience,

recorded in the poem "The Fountain's Awakening," is significant because it seemed to be a clear call to Rabindranath to "flood the world" with his poems and songs, articulating his sense of wonder through his writing.

Tagore was married off to the ten-year-old Mrinalini Devi in 1883 by Debendranath. The marriage proved to be a happy one. The couple had three daughters and two sons. Mrinalini supported her husband steadfastly in his literary and cultural endeavors until her death in 1902. For his part, Tagore involved her in his affairs, even putting her on stage in one of his productions.

The year 1884 proved to be very unhappy for Tagore; his beloved sister-in-law Kadambari Devi committed suicide in April. Apparently, she and Jyotirindranath had drifted apart because of his many preoccupations, and the newly married Rabindranath also had little time for her. The death of Kadambari was one of the most tragic events in Tagore's life. His triangular relationship with Jyotirindranath and Kadambari had been intense and complex, and he brooded on her death seemingly for the rest of his life. He would compose songs and poems about her, and the relationship became the source for his famous story "The Broken Nest." Even toward the end of his life, he was haunted by her memory and expressed his grief in his paintings and poetry.

Despite the shock of Kadambari's death, however, Tagore continued to compose songs, poems, plays, and prose works at a prodigious rate, and to take on new responsibilities. In 1884 he became secretary of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, which claimed to be the original branch of the reformist sect. He always took his religious duties seriously; the idea of divinity in man and nature permeated his life and writings. He composed music for events of the Samaj and sang at their meetings. He wrote and delivered sermons regularly then and in Santiniketan later.

Tagore was also becoming part of the nationalist tide that was now flooding India. He composed patriotic poems and engaged in controversies in print over religious and social issues to assert his vision for the future of the country. A short trip to England in 1890 seemed to have made him only more critical of colonial rule.

In 1890, Debendranath gave Tagore the responsibility of running the family estates in East Bengal. Tagore made Shilaidaha (now part of

Kushtia, Bangladesh) his base. He had to travel extensively to visit his family's far-flung holdings in this deltaic land. It will be no exaggeration to say that the experience changed him decisively. For the first time, perhaps, Tagore, essentially city-bred till then, gained full exposure to the countryside and came into close contact with rural people. For the first time, too, he undertook managerial duties on a scale that immersed him in work with ordinary men and women and also involved him directly in economic and public affairs. As a consequence, new elements entered his writings. His verse now was steeped in his awareness of the natural world, while his short fiction and prose took a turn away from romance, history, and legend to focus on the quotidian. He also picked up folk tunes and became familiar with the *bauls,* wandering minstrels with a philosophy based on mysticism, religious tolerance, and esoteric rites. Tagore was now poised to become a great writer.

In 1891 Tagore made his debut as a writer of short stories. In the same year, he and his nephew Sudhindranath Tagore started editing the monthly *Sadhana.* With characteristic energy and inventiveness, Tagore inundated the magazine with fiction, criticism, essays, and other literary compositions. He would eventually become its sole editor and make it the vehicle of some of his best work of the period. His widening circle of interests became evident as he now began to write about education, the importance of using Bengali, the tyranny of colonial rule, Hindu-Muslim relations, folk culture, and rural development. *Sadhana* ceased publication in 1895, but Tagore would find outlets for his creative energy and burgeoning interests in a succession of short-lived periodicals such as *Bharati* and *Bangadarshan,* which he began editing in 1898 and 1901, respectively.

By the end of the nineteenth century it was clear that Indians would not be content with anything less than self-rule. Tagore became increasingly nationalistic and anti-British in his work, and promoted the virtues of self-reliance. This was the period when Tagore wrote a series of patriotic songs that were then taken up by others. When Bengal was partitioned in 1905 and the Swadeshi movement was launched, these songs were sung all over the country. Tagore's contributions to the movement also included essays and lectures criticizing colonial education, and po-

ems like the ones collected in *Katha* (*Lays and Ballads,* 1900) celebrating Indian heroes of the past. He set up a weaving school in Kushtia and an agricultural school in Patisar, both parts of his estate, with the aim of encouraging self-reliance and improving agriculture. He also tried to implement his ideas about the kind of education that would inculcate Indian values and privilege the vernacular by establishing a school on his father's Santiniketan estate. For this school he drew inspiration from the *tapovanas* or the ancient schools of India that were located in forests or meditation groves.

The new century, however, introduced a series of personal tragedies for Tagore. Mrinalini Devi died in 1902, followed by one of his daughters in 1903 and his father in 1905. But the culminating tragedy for him was the death of his dear son Samirindranath in 1907. Tagore coped with these tragedies in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, he took recourse to prayer and meditation, expressing his emotions in some intensely personal and spiritual writings; on the other hand, he focused on building his school, teaching, managing his estate, and participating in the ongoing anti-Partition movement in Bengal. However, he eventually became alienated from the movement because of the violent turn it took; this would be symptomatic of his attitude to the nationalist movement in subsequent decades. Although always critical of British rule, he distanced himself from the excesses of nationalism in India and elsewhere. Tagore opposed colonial oppression, yet he remained receptive to the influence of western culture and regarded the interaction between civilizations as a positive force.

Tagore's literary work almost always continued unabated despite his personal problems and heavy involvement in public affairs. The first collected edition of his poetry, *Kavyagranthavali,* came out in 1896, and his first collection of short stories, *Galpaguchchha,* in 1900. The poetry he had written thus far was collected in the nine volumes of *Kavya-Grantha,* published in 1903 and 1904; his works in prose, including his comedies and skits, were published in sixteen volumes between 1907 and 1909 as *Gadya Granthavali.*

His writings were noted in Bengal not for their bulk but for their variety, subject matter, topical interest, and innovative nature. For exam-

ple, *Sonar Tari* (*The Golden Boat,* 1892) signaled a distinctive turn toward the symbolic in Bengali poetry. "The Lord of Life," from his 1896 collection *Chitra,* created controversy over his very personal concept of religion. His serialization of his novel *Chokher Bali* (1903) marked a decisive moment in the history of the Bengali novel because of the way it delved into the minds of men and women. *Gora* (1907), a novel of ideas, saw him boldly engaged in negotiating the strong ideological currents of the time. The skits collected in *Vyangakautuk* (1906) mocked Brahmin and upper-class pretensions and delighted audiences. Prose pieces he wrote at this time such as "The Problem and the Cure" were seized on by nationalists who were also singing his patriotic songs. If Bengali readers had initially been merely curious about this prodigy or bemused by his rather dilettantish image, by the first decade of the century they were beginning to regard him as a major talent. He was by then quite visible at cultural events and on political occasions. He was requested to preside over the Bengal Literary Conference held in 1907 and the Bengal Provincial Conference in 1907. A public reception given to him in Kolkata in January 1912 in a belated commemoration of his fiftieth birthday confirmed his emergence as one of the leading writers in Bengal.

However, the world outside Bengal knew little or nothing about Tagore's works. A couple of his short stories and poems had been translated into English and published in *The Modern Review,* but this was a Kolkata journal and limited in its impact. Some Bengali admirers living in England translated some of his poems and stories and reported that they were well received there, but their impact was also limited. These admirers felt that Tagore's presence in England would make a difference, and so invited him there. He also attracted the attention of the London-based painter Sir William Rothenstein, who had visited the Jorasanko house of the Tagores.

Tagore therefore decided that the time had come to launch himself in England. He sailed for England for the third time in May 1912—his second trip there in April 1891 was aborted in Madras because of the illness of a fellow traveler. This time he carried a notebook containing translations of mostly spiritual prose poems. He had begun translating them while convalescing in Shilaidaha and took advantage of the sea voy-

age to polish them further. Arriving in London in June 1912, he handed the notebook containing over a hundred prose poems to Rothenstein. Excited by the poems, the painter sent copies of the notebook to W. B. Yeats, Stopford Brooke, and others. He also arranged a reading of Tagore's poems on 30 June where, among others, Yeats, Brooke, Ezra Pound, and Ernst Rhys heard him read some poems and sing a few of them. Other readings and receptions followed; soon, at least a section of literary London was abuzz with his work. Tagore's plays *The King of the Dark Chamber* and *The Post Office* were performed some weeks later. Thus by the time he left London for the United States in October to visit his son Rathindranath, who was studying agriculture at the University of Illinois, Tagore left behind a host of distinguished English and expatriate admirers.

Indefatigable in his efforts to promote Tagore, Rothenstein persuaded the India Society to publish 750 copies of the 103 prose poems after Yeats had done some light editing. Tagore called the collection *Gitanjali (Song Offerings).* When this edition was sold out, Rothenstein persuaded Macmillan to publish the collection, along with an enthusiastic introduction contributed by Yeats. The reviews were mostly very appreciative. An anonymous reviewer of the *Times Literary Supplement* welcomed the poems for their "harmony of emotion and idea," so wanting in European writing. The reviewer added, "As we read the pieces we seem to be reading the psalms of a David in our time" (cited in Kripalani, p. 233).

When Tagore arrived in the United States, his fame had preceded him in at least a few poetic circles, not a little due to Pound's exuberant response. He had seen to it that six of Tagore's poems were published by Harriet Monroe in the influential periodical *Poetry.* Monroe also invited Tagore to Chicago. The saintly looking poet with his almost transcendental verse was invited to lecture on his spiritual beliefs at Illinois, at Chicago, and at Harvard. His lectures were subsequently published in *Sadhana* (1913); they enhanced his reputation as the kind of meditative and soothing poet war-strained westerners needed to read. Three other translations of his verse were published the same year. Though the translations did not match the quality of the English writings of the previous

year, they did not dent his reputation. On the contrary, the number of Tagore admirers kept increasing dramatically in the parts of England and the United States that he had visited.

Still, in November 1913 the news that Tagore had won the Nobel Prize surprised almost everyone. He was the first Asian to win the prize, and his fame was based on a slim volume of verse. He had been nominated for the prize by Thomas Sturges Moore, but he was considered a long shot at most—Thomas Hardy and Emile Faguet had appeared to be the favorites. Tagore was awarded the prize mostly due to the efforts of the Swedish poet Verner von Heidenstam, who had declared on reading the English *Gitanjali:* "I was deeply moved when I read them and I do not remember having read any lyric writing to equal them during the past twenty years or more" (cited in Kripalani, 242). Per Hallstrom, another member of the Selection Committee, whose response was also decisive, noted, "What Nobel in his innocence believed that we could do each year—present a new genius to the world—is something we are now free to do, for once" (cited in Dutta and Robinson, *Myriad-Minded Man,* 186).

The Nobel Prize made Tagore a celebrity in India and internationally. Indians were delighted that they had a poet whom the world had acclaimed; Bengalis henceforth called him *viswa kabi* or "the world poet." The British administration also felt they had to honor him; he was knighted in 1915. Tagore was gratified by the award, but rather alarmed at the adulation that followed; never again would he enjoy the privacy to which he was accustomed. Everyone seemed to have great expectations of him—Indians, the British literati, and the western reading public. Even countries where English was not spoken sought him out and wanted readings or translations of his works. Moved by his poems, writers as famous as André Gide in France and Zenobia Jiminez in Spain translated his works. He was now world famous.

Tagore took his new role seriously. At home he remained involved in the struggle against British rule and the movement for self-reliance, while abroad he was in great demand as the sage of the east. He felt strongly that humanity had to come together nationally and globally, overcoming barriers erected by those who were short-sighted, jingoistic,

and chauvinistic. The violence of the First World War and the nationalist movement in India distressed him. He felt drawn toward Gandhi's message of nonviolence and self-reliance, becoming progressively more outspoken in denouncing the repressive measures adopted by the British in India. Tagore and Gandhi met for the first time in Santiniketan on 6 March 1915. They took a liking to each other that would grow over the years despite the many and sometimes marked differences in their outlooks about the route India should take to independence.

Tagore embarked on his fourth tour of the world in May 1916. His first major stop was Japan, where he delivered lectures on the dangers of nationalism. He felt that Japan had adopted an overtly aggressive posture and was perversely bent on imitating the imperial outlook of the West as well as its worship of the machine. He continued lecturing in the same vein during the extended tour of the United States that followed. These lectures would be published in 1917 in a book called *Nationalism.* Criticized roundly at that time in Japan and the United States for its trenchant critique of nationalism and the excesses of capitalism, it has subsequently proved to be one of his most appreciated books in English. In 1919, Tagore rejected his knighthood in protest against the Amritsar massacre in which over 400 Indian protesters were brutally mowed down by British troops.

Despite his many overseas tours and public commitments at home, Tagore continued to produce quality work in Bengali, demonstrating that his desire to innovate and his dread of repeating himself had not deserted him. In 1916 he published two complex novels, *Ghare Baire (The Home and the World)* and *Chaturanga (Quartet).* The former is about human relationships torn apart by ideological conflicts and the latter tracks the insidiousness of desire. In *Balaka (The Flight of Geese),* a collection of poems, Tagore rejects inertia and expresses his craving for change. In 1917 he initiated a literary revolution of sorts by writing the first short story in *chaltibhasha* or colloquial Bengali.

Tagore's most important initiative in the years after the Nobel Prize was the establishment of Visva-Bharati, an institution that he would build over the years to bring East and West together and promote knowledge that was intercultural and humanistic. In the first two months of

1919 he undertook a lecture tour in South India where he tried to raise money for this venture. Later that year he founded departments of Indology and Fine Arts in Santiniketan and started to teach in them. In 1920 he set out on his fifth foreign tour to raise funds for his projected university. In this extended trip lasting over a year, he traveled across the European continent and the United States, lecturing to raise funds and resources. The climax of the tour perhaps was his Nobel Lecture, presented to members of the Swedish Academy at Stockholm eight years after he won the prize. Visva-Bharati officially opened as a university on 23 December 1921. Tagore had already allocated his property and the interest from the Nobel Prize to the Santiniketan school; henceforth the prize money itself, the copyright fees of his Bengali works, and a lot of his energy would be devoted to sustaining the institution and expanding its sphere of activities.

Tagore's long tour of the West was not a monetary success. He did, however, manage to attract the attention of many leading intellectuals—especially in continental Europe, where he would tour again in 1926—but noticed a marked decline of popular interest in his literary works in the West. He even detected a certain amount of resentment in England and America. As early as 1913, with the appearance of *Sadhana: The Realization of Life,* Tagore's philosophical stance drew criticism from the Anglo-American press. *The Nation* in New York accused him of "flabby mysticism," and the *Spectator* in Britain detected "a fatal flaw of insincerity" in Tagore's "most seemingly elevated utterances." *Nationalism* (1917) received a mixed response in America and England, with some reviewers focusing on Tagore's abstract mysticism, some dwelling on his exotic image, and others calling him a neo-Hindu who did not really understand politics. To many western readers, Tagore's poetry appeared exotic but incomprehensible, like "a Persian carpet or a Japanese print" (Aronson, 14).

Several explanations can be offered for this situation: many in the English-speaking world had not taken kindly to his rejection of the knighthood and his denunciation of the nexus between capitalism, jingoism, imperialism, and nationalism; he had rushed into print too many translations of his work without vetting them to ensure the kind of stan-

dards he had set for *Gitanjali;* and fashions in literature had changed drastically among war-weary Europeans now resigned to life in a wasteland, in the era later labeled "high" modernism. Tagore's books did not go completely out of print in the West, and he continued to attract some new readers there, but the popularity he had enjoyed for a while after the Nobel Prize all but dissipated. He now found pockets of admirers in the English-speaking world and his books gradually became part of the niche book market. In mainland Europe, interest in Tagore and demand for translations of his work persisted for a while, and his impact continued to be felt in the Far East and Latin America for a long time.

Tagore's sixth foreign tour took him to China and Japan in 1924. Large crowds greeted Tagore in Beijing and other Chinese cities, confirming his belief that he was reviving the ancient contact between India and China that Buddhist missionaries had initiated in ancient times. His public lectures did not go unopposed, though. A leaflet in Chinese, circulated at his second lecture in Beijing, declared: "Dr. Tagore would have nationality and politics abolished, replacing them with the consolation of one's soul. These are a refuge and a source of aesthetic joy for the sluggards, but not for us. We cannot but oppose Dr. Tagore, who upholds these things which would shorten the life of our nation" (cited in Dutta and Robinson, 1995, 251).

Tagore was friendly with the Japanese art historian and curator Okakura Tenshin, whom he had met in Kolkata in 1902. Okakura, a champion of Japan's cultural heritage, drew Tagore's attention to civilizational links between India and the rest of Asia. During his visits to Japan in 1916, 1924, and 1929, Tagore was struck by the beauty of their traditional culture, but repelled by the evidence of industrialization and the growing commercialism that he saw there. His critique of Japan's nationalism met with growing hostility in Japan, and in 1938, he would exchange public letters with Japanese poet Yone Noguchi in which the two of them would express their mutual disagreement on the issue of Japan's military interventions in Korea and China.

Tagore's growing international reputation led to invitations to visit other countries as well. In 1922 he visited Sri Lanka. In 1924 he set out for Peru, but because he felt sick en route, he ended up spending a

few months in Argentina instead. On his way back from Argentina, he returned via Italy to India. In 1927 he toured Southeast Asia. Leonard Elmhirst, the English agricultural economist and Tagore's close associate in his rural reconstruction projects, noted that the impact Tagore had on Chinese intellectuals was considerable: "It was not until he had met with the scholars at Peking that the Chinese progressives suddenly realized how much common ground they shared with Tagore. Like Dante and Chaucer in their own day and age, Tagore and Hu Shih were both determined to use the vernacular of their peoples as the ordinary medium for literary expression rather than some classical dialect that had been the monopoly of a limited group of literati" ("Personal Memories of Tagore" in *Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume,* 21). Tagore's lectures in China and Japan focused on Asian unity and the need to go beyond western materialism and concepts of development.

In 1926, Tagore again visited Italy, where he was well received by Mussolini and feted by the public. Later, however, he realized the dangers of fascism, and came out against it in letters written to C. F. Andrews and Carlo Formichi, an Italian scholar who had been sent to Santiniketan earlier by the Italian government. In Argentina the ailing Tagore met the Argentinean publisher and promoter of art Victoria Ocampo and accepted her offer to stay in her house until his health was restored. With her Tagore developed one of his most intimate relationships. It was at her home that he wrote some very fine poems and began transforming his doodles into works of art. Later, when he took to painting seriously, she would prove to be not only a muse but also an impresario, helping organize his international debut as a painter in Paris in 1931.

Throughout the 1920s, during his foreign trips and in the years he spent at home, Tagore continued to take his creative work in newer directions, drawing upon his experiences of other cultures. For instance, the tours of the decade resulted in travelogues about his trips to Japan (*Japan-Jatri,* 1919). His reflections on his visits to the West and Java were published in one volume as *Jatri* (1929). Perhaps because of his exposure to modernism, he experimented with prose poems—as in the collection titled *Lipika* (1922)—and wrote quite a few poems in free verse. Increasingly, he tended to tone down the music in his lyrical poems as if to bring

himself closer to modern poetry. The volume of poetry titled *Purabi* shows the impact of his encounter with Ocampo. In his plays, too, he strove for a fusion of eastern and western traditions in works such as *Roktokorobi* (1926). His trip to Indonesia so impressed him that he incorporated elements of Balinese dance-drama in the plays he composed and choreographed toward the end of the 1920s. He would even send someone to the island so that the intricacy of Balinese batik work could be replicated in Santiniketan's arts and crafts institutions. Tagore was always receptive to change. He drew inspiration from his travels abroad as well as within India. He experimented with indigenous traditions such as the classical music of north or south India, or the Manipuri dance traditions of northeast India. Always, he would take only what he needed and follow his own path, refusing to be overwhelmed by any one literary style or movement. *Shesher Kabita* (*Farewell Song,* 1929), his last major work of the decade, for instance, is a novel that shows his complex take on modernity, acknowledging modernism wryly, yet ambivalent in his response to it.

In the 1930s Tagore's productivity did not lessen, though his health declined steadily. He reduced the number of his overseas tours but continued to be creative, writing even from a sickbed or in convalescence. In addition to his writings in prose and verse and his social, cultural, and educational commitments and political interventions, he somehow found the time to paint hundreds of pictures. He also composed and choreographed several dance dramas and musical plays.

The decade opened with another extended tour of Europe and North America, the highlights of which were his first painting exhibition in Paris on 2 May 1930, his delivery of the Hibbert Lectures at Oxford and Manchester, published as *The Religion of Man* (1931), his visit to Russia in September, which he recorded enthusiastically in *Russiar Chithi* (*Letters from Russia,* 1931), and the reception he was awarded by President Hoover in Washington, D.C., in December. In 1932 he traveled to Iran. He wrote about his experience of the land of Hafiz—his father's favorite poet—in the travelogue *Japan-Parasye* (*Travels in Japan and Persia,* 1936). His last overseas trip would be to Sri Lanka in 1934. After this tour

he became too frail for extended visits to other lands, despite his wanderlust.

In 1931 his seventieth birthday was observed by his admirers at home and abroad through a public reception in Kolkata on 11 May and with the publication of the *Golden Book of Tagore* in December. The numerous essays and felicitations sent for the massive volume from all corners of the world indicated the extent to which Tagore had become a celebrity and a revered figure. His seventy-second birthday was celebrated with almost equal enthusiasm by Iranians, for Tagore was then touring Persia. Tagore himself, however, found his birthdays a time for contemplation, as indicated in the brooding poem "Panchishe Baisakh" ("The Twenty-fifth of Baisakh"), composed for his birthday in 1935.

In fact, Tagore in his seventies had other things to brood about, nationally and internationally. At home, Indians were mobilizing against the British, and the "Quit India" movement had developed a momentum of its own. Time and again, it went out of control; people were becoming restive and Hindu-Muslim relationships had deteriorated. Tagore dreaded this fratricidal situation as well as the violence that had accompanied anti-British agitation for decades, but he now felt that things were going from bad to worse. He wrote with urgency on the topics of Hindu-Muslim relations and feudal practices in contemporary India. As before, he criticized British policies publicly but did not spare nationalist excesses. As on the eve of the First World War, he started to brood about the tense situation in Europe that appeared to be taking the European continent to the brink of another war. Outbreaks of Japanese aggression in the Far East distressed him. When war broke out in the West and the East and the whole world was in a conflagration stoked by hatred and the lust for power, Tagore delivered his final birthday message, tinged with despair at the turn humanity had taken, in May 1941. The English version was titled "Crisis in Civilization." Tagore concludes by declaring that despite signs everywhere of the ruins of "a proud civilization," he would not "commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man" and "would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit

of service and sacrifice." He continued to affirm his faith in mankind through his writings and his institutions and reform schemes until the very end. Indeed, though the physical discomforts of age increased at the end of the 1930s, he wrote comic and even nonsense verse for children, such as the ones contained in *Khapchhada* (*Out of Sync,* 1937), *Chharar Chhabi* (*Pictures in Rhyme,* 1937), *Shey* (*He,* 1937), and *Prahasani* (*The Smiling One,* 1939). Even as he lay dying, he composed poetry. His last poem, "On the Way to Creation," dictated immediately before a surgical intervention that could not revive him, expresses his hope for those who opted for the right way and reaffirms his faith in God's plan:

But you haven't benighted the truly great.
His heart is illumined with your star;
Its passages are forever clear.
His simple faith keeps it ever bright.
Let him appear deviant from outside; inside he is ever straight.
That is what he takes pride in.
People say he has been deceived.
But he has embraced truth
Cleansing his innermost being by its light.
Nothing can deceive him.
He brings the ultimate prize
To his own treasure-hoard.
He who withstands deceptions effortlessly
Gathers from your own hands
The unremitting right to peace.

Tagore's Reputation in the World

Tagore's international reputation depended mainly on translations of his works into English. From 1909 to 1912, as mentioned earlier, *The Modern Review* in Kolkata had been publishing translations of Tagore's works, especially his poems. Many of these were by Roby Dutt and Ajit Chakra-

varti. Enthused by these translations, William Rothenstein urged Tagore to produce more. Tagore now wished to translate his works himself, articulating his dissatisfaction with the work of other translators. Instead of metrical translations of his poems and songs, he favored prose renderings. When he translated *Gitanjali,* he opted for prose poems with Biblical cadences, "ahistorical and more fluid in form and intent than any English literary model would allow" (Amit Chaudhuri, "Rabindranath Tagore: the English *Gitanjali,*" *The Daily Star,* vol. 4, no. 333, 8 May, 2004). In 1912, the India Society published the English *Gitanjali,* providing Tagore with the impetus to undertake more translations of his own work. In 1913, Macmillan published three volumes of Tagore in English: *Gitanjali, The Gardener,* and *The Crescent Moon. Fruit-Gathering* (1916) and *Lover's Gifts and Crossing* (1918) followed thereafter. Translations of Tagore's plays, short stories, epigrams, lectures, and autobiographical writings were also published. Tagore now came to be known as a bilingual poet. His reputation was established with the success of *Gitanjali,* which Rothenstein did a great deal to promote. Ezra Pound praised the work highly, comparing its simplicity to that of the New Testament, and lauding its "distinctly Oriental" beauty. Pound's remarks reflect Tagore's general image in the West as a mystic and an Oriental, a "latter-day Wise Man from the East" (Lago and Warwick, eds., *Rabindranath Tagore's Perspectives in Time,* 1989, p. 5). The English *Gitanjali* was praised by critics in India as well. Buddhadeva Bose has called the English version of the book "a miracle of translation"—the miracle being "not that so much has survived," but that "the poems are re-born in the process, [and] the flowers bloom anew on a foreign soil" (*An Acre of Green Grass,* 15). Bose even finds "moments when the translation surpasses the original."

By the 1920s, however, Tagore's translations were beginning to lose their charm, and his mystic appeal faded for westerners; the magic of the *Gitanjali* years had dissipated. Tagore's reception in non–English-speaking countries varied. His work was translated by three poets who later won the Nobel Prize—André Gide, Juan Ramón Jiménez, and Boris Pasternak. He visited Germany in 1921, and again in 1926 and 1930. German writers who responded to Tagore included Bertolt Brecht, who at sixteen wrote an enthusiastic review of *The Gardener* and praised *The*

Home and the World in his diary; Rainer Maria Rilke, who showed interest in Gide's translation of *Gitanjali* but refused publisher Kurt Wolff's request that he translate the work into German; Hermann Hesse, who described Tagore as "a quiet, noble dreamer who spends his days, remote from the world, in poetic worship, and whose Indian-ness is tinged with the influence of European literature"; and Stefan Zweig, who in his letters to Romain Rolland praised Tagore's writings, especially the "serenity" and "beauty" of his poems (Kaempchen, 21–64). In 1932, Tagore met French scholar and artist Alain Daniélou, who was so inspired by *Rabindrasangeet*, Tagore's collection of songs, that he spent several decades transcribing them for voice and piano in the western musical tradition.

When Tagore traveled to China in 1924, he received a mixed reception. The crowds there were effusive, because his writings had already been translated into Chinese by admirers like Chen Duxiu and Shen Yanbing. Xu Zhimo, a young poet, had been so inspired by *The Crescent Moon* that he became one of the founders of the Xinyueshe (The Crescent Moon Society) in 1923, and in 1925 launched a monthly journal in collaboration with his poet friend Wen Yiduo called *The Monthly Crescent Moon.* But Tagore's speeches met with opposition from certain political quarters, as mentioned earlier. In 1983, Zhang Guangliang of the Institute of South Asian Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences at Beijing published a volume entitled *Lun Taige'er (On Tagore),* containing articles on Tagore by various Chinese scholars and political activists written between 1921 and 1924.

Among Russians, too, Tagore found admirers like the painter Nicholas Roerich and the theater director Konstantin Stanislavsky, and translators such as the Nobel laureate Ivan Bunin and Leo Tolstoy's son Ilya Tolstoy. Most of his works available in English were translated into Russian by the late 1920s. *Gitanjali* itself had been translated into Russian (from English) several times. In Persia and Iraq, Tagore found himself well received and accepted as a poet, though the crowds knew little about his work. In Teheran, he was lauded as "the greatest star shining in the eastern sky" (Dutta and Robinson, 1995, 317).

Tagore's international reputation during his lifetime was thus a fluctuating mixture of fame, indifference, criticism, and adulation.

Though his English writings were substantial, his image as a writer and thinker depended primarily on translations. While the English *Gitanjali* remains a unique creative work in its own right, most of these translations fail to do justice to Tagore's original writings in Bengali. The poems often lack lyricism, and the English is archaic, removed from everyday life. Tagore himself was aware of this. As his letters and conversations reveal, he was not very confident about his own command of English and far from complacent about English translations of his work. He also tried to make his works accessible to readers in the West by toning down the Indianness of his works. As a result, these translations often lack the sparkle and the cultural specificity of the originals.

After *Gitanjali,* the subsequent volumes of translations seemed designed to perpetuate the image of Tagore as a seer and a mystic poet. Edward Thompson, the author of *Rabindranath Tagore: Poet and Dramatist,* noted that Tagore had "avoided his boldest, strongest poems or watered [them] down to prettiness" (quoted in Buddhadeva Bose, *Kabi Rabindranath,* 1966, p. 120). Also, the translations adopted the same monotonous style, making it appear that Tagore's poetry lacked variety. According to Ana Jelnikar, Tagore's critique of imperialism displeased his English audience. Besides, the *Gitanjali* style, acceptable to early modernist readers, might have seemed too mannered to readers used to a "high modernist" idiom. While translating his poems, Tagore also condensed many of them, reducing some to mere paraphrases of the original and needlessly truncating others, making them appear disjointed and confused. According to Sisir Kumar Das, "What escaped Tagore's notice in the uninterrupted flow of production of his works in English was not only the growing monotony of style and diction of the translations but also the unimaginative selections and arrangements" (23).

Tagore himself seemed to have realized by 1921 that he had done himself a disservice. "Like a coward, I avoided all complexities in my translations; as a result they have become emaciated," he confessed to Edward Thompson in a letter written that year. With the publication of *The Collected Poems and Plays* in 1936, Tagore's reputation in England and America was tarnished for generations. Not all the translations in that volume were Tagore's own. Many were insipid, and the collection

did not reflect his versatility. The publisher, however, spread the impression that all the works were originally in English. The book has remained in print, amplifying the damage to Tagore's reputation across decades. Careless editing by publishers also complicated matters. Macmillan, for instance, published their edition of *Gora* in English with errors that Tagore found "ludicrous" because of their hurry to go into print (letter to Thomas Sturges Moore, 20 May 1924; Dutta and Robinson, 2005, 311). These flawed translations did much to tarnish Tagore's literary image outside India, leading many readers to wonder why he had been found worthy of the Nobel Prize.

Tagore's own conflicted personality also contributed to the fluctuations in his reputation. Arguing that Tagore's literary persona became secondary to his public image in later life, Nirad C. Chaudhuri says: "during the last thirty years of his life there existed two Tagores, one true and the other false. This dichotomy was at the root of the tragedy [of] his later life" (634). Sankha Ghosh describes Tagore's whole life as a balancing act between two images, claiming that Tagore wanted his own countrymen to view him as a remote, alien figure, while to the rest of the world, he projected himself as the quintessential Indian (Ghosh, *Nirman Ar Srishti* [Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, *c.* 1982], 192).

In his own country, especially in Bengal, Tagore was very often out of step with the trends of his time, arousing adulation among his followers and derision among those skeptical about his talent. He was almost always in the eye of a storm, stirring up as much opposition as he inspired admiration. His withdrawal from active support of the Swadeshi movement, for example, and his differences with Gandhi made him a controversial figure. Ashis Nandy, referring to Tagore's evolving views on nationalism, calls him a "dissenter among dissenters" (xi). By the 1920s, some younger writers in Bengal were contesting Tagore's supremacy, accusing him of blocking the path to modernity with his lack of innovation, though some of them, like Buddhadeva Bose, continued to admire him, admitting later that they were overshadowed by his towering genius. Considering Tagore's waning reputation at home and abroad, Nirad C. Chaudhuri predicted despondently: "Tagore is likely to remain only a hagiographical legend in Bengal and a forgotten historical figure else-

where: or the lost great man of India for future generations of men" (*Thy Hand, Great Anarch!,* 597).

Yet Tagore's memory persists in the public imagination, and his image refuses to be consigned to oblivion. In 1961, his birth centenary sparked a revival of interest in his works in some parts of the Bengali- and English-speaking world, and marked the publication of several books that attempted to reappraise his genius. In his introduction to the Sahitya Akademi publication *Rabindranath Tagore: A Centenary Volume 1861–1961* (1961), Jawaharlal Nehru comments, "This great and highly sensitive man was not only a poet of India, but also a poet of humanity and of freedom everywhere, and his message is for all of us" (xvi). Humayun Kabir, in the Tagore Birth Centenary number of the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette,* gives Tagore credit for being the first to promote federalism and nonalignment, premised on ideas of difference and multiplicity ("Tagore Was No Obscurantist," 122–125).

Although general public interest in Tagore has declined in recent years, his work continues to inspire artists and intellectuals from different parts of the world. Tagore's intellectual legacy and his relevance for our times is being increasingly recognized. Edward Said, for instance, admires Tagore for being the model postcolonial intellectual, who never allows his critical sense to be clouded by his patriotism (41). In "Literary Witness in a World of Terror: The Inward Testimony" (a lecture delivered in Kolkata in November 2008), Nadine Gordimer draws attention to Tagore's experiments with the modern psychological novel. Martha Nussbaum cites Tagore in her critique of nationalism. Ghulam Murshid's Bengali text *Rabindrabiswe Purbabanga, Purbabange Rabindracharcha* (*East Bengal in Tagore's World and Tagore in East Bengal,* 1993) offers an overview of Tagore's relationship with East Bengal, now Bangladesh. Reminiscing about her childhood days in Santiniketan, Mahasweta Devi points out the contemporary relevance of Tagore's ecological concerns: "We were taught in our school in Santiniketan that every animal, every cat, every bird, had a right to live. From childhood, we were taught to care for nature, not to break a single leaf or flower from a tree" (introduction to *The Land of Cards,* viii). Amartya Sen, in "Tagore and His India," lauds Tagore's championing of freedom of thought. Amit Chaudhuri, in

Annexure-6

Santiniketan

India

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Description

Santiniketan, popularly known today as a university town, a hundred miles to the north of Kolkata, was originally an ashram built by Debendranath Tagore, where anyone, irrespective of caste and creed, could come and spend time meditating on the one Supreme God. Debendranath, who was father of the Poet, Rabindranath, was also known as Maharshi (which means one who is both saint and sage) was a leading figure of the Indian Renaissance. In a trust deed prepared in 1888, he declared: 'Apart from worshipping the Formless, no community may worship any idol depicting god, man, or animals; neither may anyone arrange sacrificial fires or rituals in Santiniketan.... No insult to any religion or religious deity will be allowed here. The sermons given here will be such that will be appropriate to the worship of the Creator and Father and will help in ethics, benevolence and brotherhood...' It was in this area that the Maharshi had a spiritual realization while meditating under a glade of Chhatim trees (Alstonia scholaris), which were the only vegetation in this arid land of Birbhum. These trees still stand with a plaque that says, He is the repose of my life, the joy of my heart, the peace of my soul. Chhatimtala as it is called is the spot that symbolizes the starting point of Santiniketan, which was to become his son Rabindranath's home and base fro activity. It is considered to be a hallowed spot and prayer services are held here on very special days. Rabindranath, too, like his father before him would sit in meditation here, under the chhatim trees during sunset.

ASHRAMA COMPLEX: Among the structures built by the Maharshi was the Santiniketan Griha or house and the beautiful stained glass Mandir, or temple where worship is non-denominational. Both structures built in the second half of the 19th century are important in their association with the founding of Santiniketan and the universal spirit associated with the revival and reinterpretation of religious ideals in Bengal and India. A beautiful garden was laid out on all sides of the Santiniketan Bari. The top-layer of gritty

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dry soil was removed and filled up with rich soil brought over from outside. Rows of various fruit trees and trees with extended foliage for shade were planted. The avenue of Sal trees, so familiar to earlier asramites as being Rabindranath's favourite walk, was planted at this time.

The other important structures built at a later date, after Rabindranath moved to the site of Santiniketan are, the Patha-Bhavana, with beautiful frescoes by Nandalal Bose and his students, Natun-Bari, built in 1902 by the Poet for his family, this simple thatched cottage was offered to Mahatma Gandhi's Phoenix school boys in 1915. Mrinalinidevi, the Poet's wife died before the house was completed but her name lives on in the nursery school named after her - Mrinalini Ananda Pathsala which is housed here. Dehali was built in 1904 and Rabindranath lived here for a while. Santoshalaya, a single-storey house with a tiled roof is named after Santoshchandra Majumdar, one of the first students of the Santiniketan Vidyalaya. Santoshalaya is a hostel for young students of the school. The walls of this house have frescoes prepared by artists of the twenties. Built out of a donation by Satyendraprasanna Sinha of Raipur, Singha-Sadan has a clock tower and bell that regulates the timings of daily routine for the asrama inmates. It was in this building that Oxford University conferred its honorary doctorate on the Poet. Purvatoran and Paschimtoran are the two buildings on either side of Singha-Sadana. Classes are held here. Dwijaviram is a house where the Poet's eldest brother, Dwijendranath lived. Gandhiji visited him in this house. Dinantika built in 1939, is an octagonal two-storeyed structure originally used as a tea-house with the staircase on the outside; staff members of Visva-Bharati would meet in the evening for a cup of tea and relaxation. The Cha Chakra, as it was called, was instituted in the name of Dinendranath Tagore by his wife, Kamaladevi. The walls of this house have colourful frescoes by Nandalal Bose. Taladhwaj, a round mud hut with a thatched roof built around a taal tree (toddy palm) with part of its trunk and its huge palm leaves stretching out over the top, was built for Tejeschandra Sen, a treelover who would even share his lodging with one! Old Santiniketan Press: In 1917, the citizens of Lincoln, Nebraska had presented to the boys of Santiniketan, a letter-press treadle machine which saw the beginning of the Santiniketan Press, from where the Santiniketan Patrika, a newsletter was printed. Chaitya is a

small structure made of mud and coal-tar in 1934 resembling a typical thatched hut of Bengal, yet it carries a Buddhist name. Planned by Nandalal Bose and Surendranath Kar, this structure has a glass-paned showcase where newlycreated works of art were on display every few days. Ghantatala, resembling a gateway to a Buddhist stupa stands at the crossroads of Salvithika and the road leading to Cheena Bhavana from the Santiniketan house. A bronze bell hanging from the structure would, at one time, regulate the classes and other events held during the day. Gour-prangan: The open ground in front of the school building is named after Gour Gopal Ghosh, who was a student and teacher of Santiniketan. Certain ceremonies like the flag-hoisting on Independence Day and Republic Day are held here. On 23 January, the birth anniversary of Netaji is commemorated with rows of lighted lamps on the ground. Kalo Bari is a unique structure made of mud and coal-tar. Built as a hostel for Kala-Bhavana students, its walls and pillars have been decorated with relief work and is the handiwork of art-students over many years. Begun by Nandalal Bose in 1934, there are examples of Ramkinkar's works on the northern walls. Panthasala: In 1925 Hirabai, widow of Liladhar Thakkar of Bombay donated Rs 15,200 to construct a restroom for travellers and a well and water trough to provide drinking water to travellers and beasts. The rooms now house a book-store and Railway Reservation Counter. Ratan Kuthi was erected in 1924 out of a donation by Trustees of Sir Ratan Tata to be used as a residence for scholars who stayed and worked at Santiniketan. This building symbolizes the reverence to the personality of Rabindranath by the Tatas. Malancha: Built in 1926 by Rabindranath for his youngest daughter, Mira, the genesis of the Malancha house lies in the deep sense of sorrow and guilt that Rabindranath felt at the failed marriage of his daughter. He wanted this house, along with its gardens to be a solace for the lonely woman and together, father and daughter, they planned the garden.

UTTARAYANA COMPLEX: North of the ashram area described above, is the enclave of Rabindranath's own houses, built over the last three decades of his life (1919-1941). Konark, originally a mud house was the earliest dwelling that Rabindranath built for his own seclusion from activity to provide a place for his own work. It contained an east facing verandah with rows of pillars used as a stage for

plays and dance-dramas composed by the Poet. Natir Puja was first staged here. Since there were no walls in the central large room, nature was an effective backdrop. The Konark verandah was used for poetry readings by the poet. The Mrinmoyee Patio is a beautiful cemented floor with sitting arrangements. This was built on the foundation of the other mud house when it was pulled down. Rabindranath would sit in this open patio and write. Shyamali: the construction of a mud house was an experiment. Rabindranath wanted to see if instead of a thatched roof, which was always vulnerable to fire hazards, a permanent mud roof could be built. It was to be a low-cost structure and would serve as a model house for villagers. The walls were heavily built so that the weight of the mud roofs could be borne. One of the rooms was constructed by using earthen water-pots arranged inside plaster-casings to form its roof and walls. According to Rabindranath, this would keep the rooms cool as the hot air having to pass through these earthen pots would lose some of its heat. Keeping Rabindranath's ideas in mind, Surendranath Kar prepared the architectural plan and Nandalal Bose prepared the visual perspective based on the Borobudur style. The entire outside wall was decorated with beautiful relief work by Kala-Bhavana students under the guidance of Nandalal Bose. The Santals on either side of the main door and on the eastern corner were by Ramkinkar Baiz. Gandhiji and Kasturba stayed as guests in this house. Punascha, meaning postscript suggests the Poet's change of mind. Another house was built on the eastern side of Shyamali. He lived in this house for a short while but it was here that he created most of his paintings. Udichi is the last house built for Rabindranath. He felt claustrophobic, he said, and wanted a room to be constructed on four pillars. However, changes were gradually made according to the owner's needs. He took poetry classes on the ground floor. The most imposing house in Uttarayana, is Udayan. Uttarayana is the area where these five houses are located in. The gardens of Uttarayana were planned and laid out by the Poet's son, Rathindranath, a horticulturist by training. He planted in Uttarayan and in the surrounding area exotic plants and trees from other lands. The African Tulip (Spathodea campanulata) from Equatorial Africa, the Sausage tree (Kigelia africana) and Rhodesian Wistaria (Balusanthus speciosus) from Tropical Africa, the Baobab

tree (Adansonia digitata) from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean Trumpet tree (Tabebuia aura) from Latin America are some of the trees that have survived in Santiniketan as have the ideas and research studies done by foreign scholars who came to Santiniketan. Udayan, unlike the other houses was conceived by Rathindranath, not the poet. When Rabindranath came to live in Konark, Rathindranath and his wife lived in an outhouse by its side. Starting from these modest and functional rooms the elaborate structure of Udayan was gradually evolved. Udayan has many suites of rooms— each on a different level which gives this house its individuality. Distinguished visitors who have stayed here are Stella Kramrisch, Margaret Milward, Sir Maurice Gwyer, S. Radhakrishnan (later, President of India) and Jawaharlal Nehru. Guha-ghar/Chitrabhanu stands near the lake in the Japanese-styled gardens of Uttarayana. The studio or Chitrabhanu was built for Pratima Devi at a higher level of the ground and later the space below was converted into a room to be used as a workshop for Rathindranath. The workshop is a low-ceiling room and the entrance wall has rough stones on it and creepers growing over it giving it a resemblance to a cave-dwelling or guha-ghar.

INSTITUTES OF VISVA BHARATI: In 1922, Visva Bharati was inaugurated as a Centre for Culture with exploration into the arts, language, humanities, music and these are reflected in diverse institutes that continue in their educational programmes, which are based on the founding principles of excellence in culture and culture studies. As originally intended, these serve as institutes for Hindi studies, Hindi Bhavan, Sino Asian studies, Cheena Bhavan, centre for humanities, Vidya Bhavan, institute of fine arts Kala Bhavan, and music, Sangit Bhavan. The structures in these institutes constitute a myriad of architectural expressions which are as diverse as the Kalo Bari, a mud structure with coal tar finish and sculpture panels, Mastermoshai studio, a single storied structure built for the first principal of Kala Bhavan, Nandalal Bose, murals and paintings on Cheena and Hindi Bhavan, created by the illustrious artists like Benodebehari Mukhopadhyay, Nandalal Bose, Surendranath Kar, Somnath Hore with active involvement of students.

SRINIKETAN: Also in the core area, is Sriniketan, an Institute for Rural Reconstruction founded in 1922 with

Leonard Elmhirst as its first Director. Surul Kuthibari: Rabindranath purchased this building in 1912. The house was often used by the Poet as a retreat and here, in solitude, he would write. It housed the Sriniketan office and is associated with Leonard Elmhirst and Kalimohan Ghosh. In front of this building on a wall, Nandalal created a mural depicting Halakarshana a ploughing festival introduced by Rabindranath to honour the tiller of the soil. Sriniketan also houses the very significant institutes and farms that are in continued use: the Silpa Sadan, a centre for village crafts; Palli Samgathan Vibhaga, the centre for rural reconstruction; Palli Siksha Bhavan, a centre for education for village children and adults; Rural Extension Centre, that conducts research in organic and innovative farming techniques and animal husbandry.

The Santiniketan Aesthetic

For Rabindranath, who was essentially a poet and artist, the realization and the expression of beauty was the supreme objective in human life. His concept of beauty, according to true Indian tradition, was inseparably connected with truth and goodness. Whatever is true and noble in life, nature and art is also beautiful. Thus, aesthetic sensitiveness, in the true sense, is a fundamental aspect of spiritual education. A proper aesthetic culture should also include the perception and expression of the beautiful in human life and social conduct, as well as in art and literature. Rabindranath stated in no uncertain terms that man's sensory encounter with the environment was as important as his mind's enquiry into its inner mystery, and any worthwhile society should provide for both. Nandalal Bose (1882-1966) took it up as a challenge. For him, with the right effort, all members of a community, whether housewives, working men or schoolchildren can be creative of sorts within their talent and potential. So he gave attention to all, inducing them to learn alpona, batik, leather-craft, picture making with simple units; besides he tried to bring cleanliness and order into the campus, considered elegance to its building and interiors, visual variety and liveliness to its festivals and dramas, a distinctive graphic image to its publications, even set standards of refinement in personal and group conduct, so that, at one time he managed to bring to the place a special aesthetic aura, the hall-mark of which was a dynamic simplicity, an artless art. The frescoes

on many of the asrama buildings were created at his initiative; he would involve his students in this work. The murals on the lives of medieval saints which Benode Bihari Mukherjee (1904-80) created in Hindi Bhavana in 1946-47 was the artist's magnum opus. In 1972, even after he lost his eyesight, he made a large ceramic mural in the Kala-Bhavana campus.

Most of the houses built after 1919 in Santiniketan and all the five houses in Uttarayana were designed by Surendranath Kar (1892-1970). Santiniketan was acutely short of funds and the asrama had to observe utmost economy in all matters. Surendranath took up the challenge and improvised a kind of architecture that was functional, inexpensive and conformed to the quiet aesthetics of the place. Its hallmark was a sense of austerity, simplicity, elegance of proportion and sparing use of detail. His attention to function, avoidance of flamboyance, a low-keyed elegance and appropriateness to the environment appealed to all.

The landscape of Santiniketan is dotted with sculptures by Ramkinkar Baij (1906-1980), largerthan-life figures of Santals who were in reality part of the landscape. A Santal family, complete with dog, a group of workers running along at the call of the mill, their clothes flying in the air, a thresher, all situated along the main road. When Ramkinkar created Sujata, an elongated figure of one of the disciples of Buddha, he placed it just a little distance from the seated Buddha. Nandalal planted Eucalyptus saplings in the area, knowing that one day these tall trees would be a perfect setting to Ramkinkar's Sujata. It was Nandalal Bose, who created an environment where art would be a part of life and the children of Santiniketan have grown absorbing these beautiful monuments as they have the oxygen in the air.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

Founded by Rabindranath Tagore in 1901 and located about a hundred and fifty eight kilometers northwest of Kolkata in Bengal's rural hinterland, Santiniketan represents the distillation of Rabindranath Tagore's life, philosophy and

greatest works through his lifetime and the continuing legacy of his unique model of education and internationalism through a living institution and architectural ensemble. And while many of Tagore's greatest art and literary works bear a unique association with Santiniketan, it can be argued that his model of an Indian education through the revival of the tapoban tradition and humanist ideology finds its greatest reflection in Santiniketan, thus making it Tagore's greatest work. In his last letter to Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore wrote 'Visva Bharati is like a vessel carrying the cargo of my life's best treasure and I hope it may claim special care from my countrymen for its preservation'.

The school at Santiniketan was a sapling which grew into the widely branching tree that was Visva Bharati. Today, Santiniketan and Visva Bharati exemplify the continuation of Tagore's works, both as a living educational and cultural centre as well as through the generations of outstanding alumni who excelled in the worlds of painting, literature, music, sculpture, cinema, economics and politics. The architectural and landscape setting of Santiniketan embody Tagore's vision of an eclectic architectural expression that was a blending of diverse cultural traditions in a landscape setting that formed the backdrop for a literal translation of 'Santiniketan' as an abode of peace.

Humanism & Cultural interchange (Criterion ii)

Author Nirad C. Chaudhuri described Tagore as, "Historically, the greatest product of the interaction in India in the nineteenth century between European and Hindu life and civilization.... In one sense he may be regarded as the victim of the interchange, and in another as its prophet. His own life was caught in the conflict which the interchange brought about, and his writings stand for its achievement."

At the threshold of the 20th century in Bengal reeling under British rule and sectarian divisions, Tagore envisioned a place of learning unfettered by religious and regional barriers. From its very inception, Tagore modelled Santiniketan on principles of humanism, internationalism and a sustainable environment and the curriculum was developed to promote the free interchange of human values and cultures. Thus, over a hundred years ago, Santiniketan began in a majority Hindu region with 3 out of 5 teachers being Christian, encouraged women to join as both students

and teachers, and promoted a unique blend of art and cultural interchange in its classrooms that were held in the open air, free from the confines of spatial or ideological boundaries.

In developing his holistic educational paradigm, Rabindranath sought through various means to break down existing barriers and to foster interconnectivity between provincial and regional groups: between English-medium educated elites and the common people; between urban and rural economic groups...and to reduce the gender gap.

Tagore's vision finds architectural expression in Santiniketan where the buildings of China Bhavan and Hindi Bhavan were specifically built to house institutes that explored linguistic linkages between eastern countries, as well as the eclectic architectural expression of structures such as Sinha Sadan, Udayan and Patho Bhavan that merged various cultural vocabularies to create a unique architectural synthesis.

In only the second year of its existence, Santiniketan had its first foreign student in Hori San from Japan. To cultivate this interchange in the students of Santiniketan, Tagore actively solicited the presence of visitors from all over the world, in addition to devising syllabi that promoted the understanding of different cultures: Vedic, Puranic, Buddhist, Jain, Zoroastrian, and Sikh traditions; the 'precious and permanent contribution' of Islamic culture to Indian art and architecture; writings of 'our medieval saints'; special studies of China, Japan, and Tibet; as well as Western culture, for 'only then shall we able to assimilate this last contribution to our common stock'.

Noting its 'celebration of variety', Nobel laureate and long time resident of Santiniketan, Amartya Sen speaks of 'the ease with which discussions in the school could move from Indian traditional literature to contemporary as well as classical western thought and to China, Japan and elsewhere'. Tagore's poem encapsulates this vision of internationalism through his words,

"He mor chitta, punya tirthe jagore dhire

ei bharater maha-manaber sagoro-tire."

'On the sacred shores of the ocean of humanity of this India,

Awaken, my heart!'

The architectural and landscape setting of Santiniketan embody Tagore's vision of an eclectic architectural expression that was a blending of diverse cultural traditions in a landscape setting that formed the backdrop for a literal translation of 'Santiniketan' as an abode of peace.

The Tapoban & Gurukul traditions: Education & Rural Reconstruction (Criterion iii)

On 22nd December 1901, Rabindranath Tagore established his school at Santiniketan with five students (including his eldest son) and an equal number of teachers. He originally named it Brahmacharya Ashram in the tradition of ancient forest hermitages.

Santiniketan is in many ways a pioneering step in the field of education and rural reconstruction. Located in the heart of nature amongst Hindu, Muslim, and Santali villages which were in 'serious decline' despite a rich cultural heritage, the school, from almost its beginning aimed to combine education with a sense of obligation towards the larger civic community. The 'voice of the vedic tongue', Tagore said, outlined the nature of Santiniketan, envisioned as the ideal form of the traditional Indian hermitages which had at one time flourished in the forests of ancient India, great seats of learning from which the Upanishads had evolved, exploring a universal and humanistic life of the mind. Although Tagore was highly critical of Macaulay's system due to which, unlike the West, education, particularly higher education, was cut off and insulated from the living social corpus of India.

Santiniketan revives and gives form to Tagore's interpretation of the ancient Indian concept of tapoban. Tagore revived the ancient Indian model of Tapoban, or penance in a forest, interpreting it though an educational model aimed at 'cultivation of feeling' (bodher tapasya/sadhana) as opposed to education of the senses and intellect. This aspect of education involves the realization of the individual self in relation to the universe and the essential kinship of all existence. Santiniketan combines the traditions of the gurukul mode of residential schooling with its tangible manifestation in open air classrooms arranged under the canopies of trees.

In keeping with the gurukul tradition of students learning from their guru (teacher) in a residential ashram in the bosom of nature, Sriniketan is a distinct step in the field of rural reconstruction. In 1907, Tagore sought to expand the school's relationship with its neighbouring villages of the Santhal tribal community. The school, from its conception, aimed to combine education with a sense of obligation towards the larger community.

Sriniketan is the earliest experiment in rural reconstruction in India that Tagore began and was later followed by Mahatma Gandhi in his ashrams at Wardha and Sewagram. Leonard Elmhirst came from England to be part of Sriniketan and his experiences in Santiniketan inspired him to establish at Darlington Hall in Devonshire. If Tagore had done nothing else, what he did at Santiniketan and Sriniketan would be sufficient to rank him as one of India's greatest nation - builders.

Instead of celebrating religious festivals, the students of Santiniketan celebrate nature through its seasons. Thus Poush Mela (winter), Vasantotsav (spring), Varsha Mangal (rains) and Maghotsav, continuing the close connect between man and nature established in the founding principles of Santiniketan. With the outbreak of unprecedented communal violence in the wake of Bengal's partition, Tagore revived the folk festival of Raksha Bandhan, reinterpreting it in 1909 as a tie between Hindus and Muslims.

Santiniketan, or the 'abode of peace' cannot be confined to the strict definition of an academic university. Vishwabharti is an educational institution, but one with a difference, where classes are taught in the open air, where nature and its seasons are celebrated instead of religious festivals, where the graduation ceremony is marked by the gifting of a chhatim leaf and where humanism and the larger concepts of internationalism are rooted in Tagore's philosophy that 'the whole world can find a nest". (Criterion iii)

Ideas of Outstanding Universal Value: Internationalism: (Criterion vi)

Santiniketan is among the pioneering institutions in modern history that offered a living example of internationalism, before even the United Nations established its guiding

principle enshrined in Article 1, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948. Long before the League of Nations and the United Nations, Tagore was an internationalist who critiqued the narrowly defined concepts of nationalism and patriotism. He wanted all human beings to be treated equally regardless of the country or nation to which they belonged. He also did not want barriers between people even within the same nation-the barriers of caste, race, and religion.

Santiniketan is a pioneering experiment in internationalism. At a time when India was grappling with the problems of colonialism and seeking its freedom from British authority, Tagore's vision surpassed national and cultural boundaries to establish a larger international vision, that of universal humanism. Through bringing diverse individuals together in a hospitable setting, he sought to promote understanding between different linguistic groups, different races and global cultures and diverse religions.

The motto that Tagore chose for Visva Bharati, Yatra Visvam Bhavatyekanidam, 'where the whole world can find a nest', reflected his aspiration for the institution.

Tagore himself alluded to the global character of Santiniketan with an invitation to the world, while concluding his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Stockholm, in the 'name of the unity of men', in the 'name of love', and 'in the name of God', to 'join hands with us and not to leave this institution to us', to 'make it living and representative of the undivided humanity of the world'. Mainly due to his efforts, Santiketan was visited by international scholars and artists such as Sylvain Levi, Moritz Winternitz, Sten Konow, Fernand Benoit, Arthur Geddes, Andree Karpeles, Mary Eeghen, Stella Kramisch, James Cousins, T'an Yun-Shan, Yonejiro Noguchi, Guiseppe Tucci, Carlo Formichi, Arnold Bake, Igor Bogdanov, Mark Collins, and Vincenc Lesny.

Ideas of Outstanding Universal Value: Influence on the Modern Indian Nation - Inclusiveness & Non Alignment (Criterion vi)

The vision of Tagore's Santiniketan was that of inclusiveness and it influenced the vision of Gandhi and Nehru (and later Indira Gandhi who was a student at Santiniketan) in the formulation of an inclusive Indian nation.

His inclusive nationalism and non-parochial interpretation of India's history became a powerful agent of ideas for the freedom movement that Gandhi and Nehru led between the two world wars.8 Nehru's famous foreign policy of 'non-alignment' sought to avoid taking sides in the Cold War. This was very much in line with Tagore's philosophy and understanding of history.

Ideas of Outstanding Universal Value: Environmentalism, Women's Emancipation (Criterion vi)

Tagore had always championed the cause of women emancipation, most of his literary works etched unforgettable female characters. At the beginning of the 20th century, Santiniketan pioneered a coeducational model in India which was a major break from accepted social norms.

Associated Personalities (Criterion vi)

Highly gifted men and women from the different parts of India came to Santiniketan for an innovative education or to teach there. Noteworthy among them were Mrinalini Sarabhai, Gopala Reddy, Nandalal Bose, Leonard Elmherst, Arthur Geddes, Bal Gangadhar Menon and KV Muthuswamy. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, Oscar Award winning director Satyajit Ray, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen and iconic artists such as, Ram Kinker Baij and Jogen Chaudhuri, Kanika Bandhopadhyay, Udai Sankar, have been alumni of Santiniketan. Visva Bharati became therefore an important facilitator of inter relationship of cultures within the sub continent as well. Not only was it enriched by being the site of the artistic creations of some of the best known artists of modern India, its art school was arguably the best in the country. Mahatma Gandhi called Santiniketan his second home and established on the principles of its rural reconstruction model, his ashrams at Wardha and Sewagram.

Association with Rabindranath Tagore's work and ideas (Criterion vi)

The sheer volume and diversity of Rabindranath Tagore's work is outstanding. In Bengali, there are twenty-eight large volumes consisting of poetry, dramas, operas, short stories, novels, essays and diaries; and a similar number of

volumes of letters, still being edited and published. His songs separately published, number nearly two and a half thousand, his paintings and drawings over two thousand. A large fraction of all this is still read performed and studied in Bengal.

The Nobel Prize awarded to Rabindranath Tagore in 1913 for his work Gitanjali published in Bengali 1910, was an acknowledgement of his literary genius and also of his thoughts, making him the first Indian to be acknowledged by the West at this scale.

'Jana Gana Mana' 'composed by Tagore , was selected as free India's national anthem after it gained independence in 1947, but was composed by Tagore in late 1911. This stirring song is today India's national anthem, a beacon of light guiding a billion Indians.

Mahatma Gandhi referred to Tagore as Gurudev (teacher) and wrote, "I regard the Poet as a sentinel warning us against the approach of enemies called Bigotry, Lethargy, Intolerance, Ignorance, Inertia and other members of that brood."

Among individuals who made these forces creative in shaping the destiny of India, two stand out as pre-eminent, Gandhi and Tagore. The contribution of Gandhi is unmatched; he made Indian history as no one else did. That of Tagore was less obvious, but subtler and deeper, for it released and fed the hidden fountains of creative activity in fields which the politician is power. Among modern writers he has the uncommon distinction that while the sophisticated Bengali intellectuals delight in his verse and prose and learned professors write volumes on them, the simple unlettered folk in the congested lanes of Calcutta or in the remote villages of Bengal sing his songs with rapture.

Santiniketan is, most of all, distinguished by Tagore's life long association with it. It was the crystallization of his vision and the place where Tagore himself wrote many of his great works of literature, poured his creative genius into paintings and sketches and was informed of his being awarded the Nobel prize. Even the different houses in which Tagore lived in Santiniketan, which were constructed from local material and which are mainly specimens of rural architecture, were in most cases designed by him.

In his last letter to Mahatma Gandhi Tagore said that 'Visva Bharati is like a vessel carrying the cargo of my life's best treasure and I hope it may claim special care from my countrymen for its preservation'.

Human history needs to be continuously reminded of the existence of institutions such as these which continue to live in practice and form. For this, along with many other reasons, Santiniketan needs to be preserved as a World Heritage Site.

Statements of authenticity and/or integrity

Santiniketan is one of the avant garde visions of an international educational and cultural institution conceptualized in the beginning of the 20th century. The location of the facility remains unchanged even today incorporating the aspects of authenticity that is tangibly associated with spirit and feeling. In order to understand its outstanding universal value and consequently authenticity one has to first recognize the various layers of history for Santiniketan's establishment and growth which form the periods of significance.

Periods of Significance: Historical Layers

Maharishi Period (Land purchased and ashram built by Maharishi Debendranath Tagore, father of Rabindranath Tagore) Late 19th century: 1895 onwards

Santiniketan then constituted 18.7 bighas of land area that was purchased by Maharishi Debendranath Tagore from the Sinha landowners of the area.

The structures belonging to this earliest phase of development include the Ashram, Santiniketan Griha, Upasana Mandir (Prayer hall). Chhatimtala, the site of the chhatim trees under which Maharshi meditated is also critical to the historical significance and integrity of this period. This area is nearly all intact and forms the core of the Santiniketan precinct. The structures are intact and retain their integrity and authenticity. They have been recently restored by Archaeological Survey of India.

Gurudev Period (Rabindranath Tagore) 1901-1941

Rabindranath's Santiniketan, established in 1901, was a multifaceted vision that would aim unity of humanity in different cultures around the world. Visva Bharti was a place where 'the world would form a single nest' using a combination of various elements including education of children, nature loving environment, use of music and arts for emotional development, social work to help neighbouring villages, promotion of rural development through Sriniketan and research on philosophy, cultures etc. It would be a centre established to eradicate not only poverty of mind but also poverty of material life in India.

Being of an artistic nature Rabindranath believed learning to be an activity of freeing one's mind which could not be possibly achieved locked up in a classroom. Hence emerged the idea of open air classrooms which continue in the same spirit with which it was initiated at the time of the conception of the school.

Santiniketan was to be a quite rural environment surrounded by nature far away from the busy city life. He wanted to establish not only an intimidate community of teachers and students as embodied in the age old Indian tradition of Gurukul but he wanted something much more in order to create an environment which would open up students mind to a relationship with the world within and around. This tradition is still faithfully adhered to as a principle practice at the university. Rabindranath believed in convergence of two distinctly different chains of thought which were the traditional beliefs of east and progressive ideologies of west. As a result of which there were many international visiting faculties which have contributed in fulfilling his vision.

Rathindranath Period (Rabindranath's son) 1941-1952

After the death of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, his son Rathindranath took over the mantle of his father at Santiniketan. Most of the complex was preserved in tact, with the addition of Rabindra Bhavan to house the museum.

This period ends with the formulation of Visva Bharati as a national level university under an Act of Parliament.

In the Rathindranath layer, we see Santiniketan well on its path to continue the four fold vision of Gurudev.

Rabindranath Tagore had envisaged a fourfold plan for the development of Santiniketan.

1. Santiniketan School (1901)

2. Integration of fine art and music to academics(Kala Bhavan and Sangeet Bhavan 1919-1920)

3. Rural reconstruction experiment (1922 Sriniketan)

4. Establish cultural relation between Hindvi cultures with other eastern cultures and relations between eastern and western cultures.

This fourfold plan has been adopted and implemented to date even after Santiniketan acquired the status of a University in 1951.

Pockets of core areas exist within the Visva Bharti campus which strive to retain the authenticity in terms of form and design. These core areas include structures from the 3 significant stages mentioned earlier. The infill in between are a direct result of the growing needs of the university. Even though the integrity is weakened due to the pressures of development and later interventions, these interventions are mostly reversible and can be controlled in the near future with proper development guidelines.

Living traditions begun by Gurudev such as the Utsavs, festivals, open air class rooms and the curriculum that encourages the infusion of performing and fine arts in academics are an intrinsic character of Santiniketan.

Living traditions such as the Utsavs, festivals, open air class rooms and the curriculum that encourages the infusion of performing and fine arts in academics still continues with a high level of integrity.

Santiniketan and Sriniketan both form a part of the Visva Bharti campus under the jurisdiction of the University which alone forms it governing body which still keeps intact its originally intended use and function. This authoritative body is responsible for maintenance and management of the site as well as heritage conservation and its related issues.

It is concerned with site management of different areas which include maintenance, repair, presentation, promotion, visitor infrastructure etc. Being aware of the threats to the

heritage elements and its protection needs the university has recognized the need of a conservation and management plan which will address all the key issues and need for heritage conservation and the framework of these guidelines will be incorporated within the management authority.

Comparison with other similar properties

Santiniketan cannot be compared to any Occidental university and even in the Eastern world, it has few comparisons as it was based on a purely secular ideology. This was not merely an educational institution - it was a cultural confluence, an experiment in rural reconstruction and environmentalism and at the same time a confluence and coming together of myriad cultures, languages and the culmination of Tagore's principles of internationalism and universalism.

Rabindranath Tagore was categorical about Santiniketan not being anything like the idea of a western university. He said, "The mischief that as soon as the idea of a university enters our mind, the idea of a Cambridge university, Oxford university, and a host of other European universities, rushes in at the same time and fills the whole space. We then imagine that our salvation lies in a selection of the best points of each, patched together in an eclectic perfection. We forget that the European universities are living, organic parts of the life of Europe, where each found its natural birth. Patching up noses and other small missing fractions of our features with skin from foreign limbs is allowed in modern surgery; buy to build up a whole man by piecing together foreign fragments is beyond the resources of science, not only for the present time, but let us fervently hope for all time to come."

BAUHAUS

The Bauhaus School was founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany in the year 1919. Weimar is one of the great cultural sites in Europe and was also awarded a UNESCO World Heritage site status in 1998. Bauhaus was first of its kind that combined craft and fine arts, creating a 'total' work of art in which all arts, including architecture

would eventually be brought together. The Bauhaus style became one of the most influential currents in Modern architecture and modern design. The origins of Bauhaus were far from the earlier methods of education in industrial art, fine art and architecture. Its program was based on the latest knowledge in pedagogy. Bauhaus was based on a socialist ideology that an artist must be conscious of his social responsibility to the community; on the other hand, the community has to accept the artist and support him. The Bauhaus had a profound influence upon subsequent developments in art, architecture, graphic design, interior design, industrial design, and typography. The Bauhaus movement which was mainly influenced by modernism had created major influences around the world especially on arts and craft in western Europe and in countries like USA, Canada and Israel.

Now known as the Bauhaus University of Weimar it has faculties in Architecture, Art and Design, Civil Engineering and Media. Today the University well known for its civil engeneering and architecture oriented disciplines offers variety of courses in free art, design, web design, visual communication, media design, media culture, architecture, civil engineering, materials science, processing technology, environment and management.

The term "Bauhaus" stands for an eagerness to experiment, openness, creativity, a close link to industrial practice and internationality. Building on the tradition of the Bauhaus movement, all the faculties of the University are involved in the creation of public spaces. The goal is to get science, art and technology working together systamatically, artistically and innovatively on the planning, construction and design of current and future spaces of habitation. Practical experience plays an important role in all academic fields, as well as in artistic development.

AUROVILLE

Auroville (the city in the making) is located on the Coromandel Coast on the outskirts of Pondicherry in south India. It draws its inspiration from the vision and work of the renowned Indian philosopher and spiritual visionary Sir Aurobindo in collaboration with Mirra Alfassa (The Mother) in the year 1968. Auroville is based on the ideology the of manifestation of human unity in diversity. The township was

founded on barren land and now has transformed into a green belt with a large variety of flora and fauna.

Auroville rose out of a necessity to build an ideal city in the form of an experiment to create a passage for a new realization which needed implementation on a grass root level. It was intended for up to 50,000 inhabitants from all around the world. It currently houses 20,000 people of various nationalities. They live in various settlements sharing the land with 35,000 local populations in the surrounding villages.

The settlement is based on the collaboration of eastern and western ideologies. It is a 'universal' city where people from all creeds, castes and nationalities can live and thrive in harmony.

Auroville has its fundamentals based on partnership of Aurovilians with nature and the local population. These fundamentals are practiced in various forms of activities such as tree planting schemes, organic agriculture, educational research, village development, cultural activities, community services, land re-generation, rain water harvesting, conservation approach and many more. To manifest its principles these diverse activities are housed in the various scientific and social research, educational, agro-institutions, community centers and volunteering, internships & studies programs. All these activities and institutions are housed under one umbrella body constantly working towards experimenting on new methods of education, fine arts, village extension work, physical education and research in Indian culture and its evolution.

Town and Country Planning Organization and Auroville Foundation have drawn up the Auroville Master Plan of international significance. This master plan is divided into three stages: perspective plan, development plan and implementation plan. This plan hopes to demonstrate how 'urban' & 'rural' areas can complementarily develop in an integral and holistic way for their mutual benefit and well-being. Auroville wants to break new ground in settlement-planning in such a way as to help other cities, both in India and abroad, which are experiencing high urbanization trends.

Auroville can be compared to Santiniketan on two accounts, one that its establishment was linked with an Indian visionary (Sri Aurobindo) and that it is a community that changed a barren landscape into a human settlement based on the principles of internationalism and human unity.

However, Santiniketan as an idea not only was envisioned over half a century before Auroville, it also has a greater educational aspect to it, while Auroville is more on the lines of a commune. Santiniketan's Visva Bharati University has a much larger role to play in the sphere of Indian education.

Banaras Hindu University (BHU)

Banaras Hindu University is situated in the holy city of Varanasi in north India. This centre of learning was founded by a great nationalist leader, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, in 1916 with the cooperation of nationalist leaders and Gandhians such as Dr Annie Besant.

BHU aimed to promote the study of the Hindu Shastras and of Sanskrit literature as a means of preserving and popularizing the best thought and culture of the Hindus and all that was good and great, learning and research in arts and science in all branches, to advance and diffuse such scientific ,technical and professional knowledge as is best calculated, to help in promoting indigenous industries and in developing the material resources of the country and to promote the building up of character in youth, by making religion and ethics an integral part of education.

Banaras Hindu University ranks among the first few in the country in the field of academic and research output. This university has two campuses with a number of institutes, faculties, departments, advanced centres and interdisciplinary schools all working towards excellence in areas of Science, Social Science, Technology, Medicine and Agriculture. It is also associated with a number of outreach programmes in community development, social work, environmental protection, rainwater harvesting etc. its social welfare agricultural extension programme promotes services in rural development and self-employment.

In 1911, Tagore wrote an essay, "Hindu Visvabidyalay", which was composed around the time of the establishment of Banaras Hindu University and Aligarh Muslim University.

In it, he discusses the problem of communal education within the larger context of communalism. Tagore argued (in line with his belief that "Unity does not mean Uniformity") that real unity among different units will be possible only when each unit, however small, fully realizes its own individuality and stature. He felt it fitting that Hindus and Muslims should attain full growth and maturity through their own systems and the "free breath of modern learning would serve as an emancipating force."

While Tagore supported the idea of religious communities fostering educational research and revival of their cultures, his educational system at Santiniketan was based on plurality of cultures and religion, with even the nascent stages of Santiniketan having 2 Hindu and 3 Christian teachers. Santiniketan was established a decade before BHU and in its ideology, did not limit itself to Hinduism, but to a much larger universal and international outlook.

SEVAGRAM & SABARMATI ASHRAM

Tagore's experiments at Santiniketan and Sriniketan were to deeply influence Mahatma Gandhi's work at Sevagram at Wardha. Gandhi adopted the method of teaching through crafts many years after Tagore had successfully established this at Santiniketan. Infact, the first teachers in Gandhi's basic school were from Santiniketan.

Mahatma Gandhi established Sevagram in a village near Wardha in Maharashtra, 75 kilometers away from Nagpur at the invitation of Jamnalal Bajaj. From 1936 to 1948, Mahatma Gandhi was based here, spreading the message of Non Violence in his work towards Indian Independence.

In April 1936, Gandhiji established his residence in the village Shegaon which he renamed as Sevagram, which means 'village of service'. Many decisions on important national matters and movements were taken at Sevagram. Though initially Gandhiji had decided to live here with only his wife Kasturba, pressure of work necessitated more colleagues join him at Sevagram until it became known as Sevagram Ashram and became a full-fledged institution.

The Satyagraha Ashram, later renamed as Harijan Ashram, was established as part of the Freedom Movement. The Satyagraha Ashram was founded on May 25, 1915 in

Ahmedabad at Kochrab, when Gandhi returned from South Africa, with 25 inmates. The Ashram was shifted on the bank of river Sabarmati in July 1917. Devoted ashramites led a community life in search of Truth and Non-violence under his guidance.

Sabarmati Ashram, at the banks of Sabarmati river was located in Ahmedabad and came to be known as 'Sabarmati Ashram'. Gandhi stayed at the Ashram from 1915 to 1933 after which the Ashram was disbanded.

KALAKSHETRA

Kalakshetra was established in 1936 by Rukmini Devi Arundale near Madras, (Chennai) in South India. It was built as an arts academy forming an extension to the Theosophical Society. Kalakshetra became the first dance institute to establish a meaningful theoretical syllabus for dancers. The academy provides not only education in fine arts but also runs a craft education research centre and a school where students have the opportunity of combining fine arts studies with the regular primary and secondary education syllabus. The academy advocates a holistic approach towards education. Open air classes are conducted in order to provide exposure to arts and help students appreciate nature.

NRITYAGRAM

Nrityagram is an institution specialising in Classical Indian Dance forms. It is situated near the outskirts of the city of Bengaluru in south India. Established in 1990 by Protima Gauri, Nrityagram is a community of dancers following a lifestyle of the Gurukul tradition, influenced to some degree by Kalakshetra and Santiniketan. The institution encourages an awareness of the interdisciplinary approach and an understanding of the inter-relatedness of all arts and physical traditions, not only of India, but also of other countries. Along with the intensive dance training in their residential dance education programmes, the students learn Indian Literature, mythology, poetry, Sanskrit, music, aesthetics, history of dance, philosophy, spiritual thought and dance theory. Regular workshops are conducted in martial arts, yoga, mime, meditation, sculpture, etc. The institution believes in self-sufficient existence where they use their resources to the fullest and share a relationship

with the earth they reside on and as a member they believe not only being a complete dancer but also a complete human being.

The institution also runs various villages and school outreach programmes encouraging local children from various financial and social backgrounds to participate in various workshops and pursue a career in dance.

DARTINGTON HALL TRUST

Dartington Hall trust was established in 1925 on a thousand acre estate bought by Leonard Elmhirst and his wife Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst as a rural experiment based on the ideals of Rabindranath Tagore and Sriniketan. This experiment combined the introduction of new methods in farming and forestry, and the creation of related industries, with the promotion of the arts and crafts, the founding of a co-educational boarding school and other educational experiments, and the care and conservation of buildings and landscape.

The trust's aspiration is to continue work in the form of encouragement of human creativity, artistic, intellectual and practical; the promotion of learning by doing; and the attainment of the highest standards of performance and execution in all the activities undertaken. Independent but complementary activities in the arts, crafts, education and social justice, notably the Dartington College of Arts, also take place on the estate, many of them offshoots of the Trust.

The trust promotes five aspects of its programmes of work namely Arts which is necessary for nourishing the human spirit, Sustainability which believes that environmental protection and economic development should be complimentary goals and works towards progress, Social justice which recognizes gap between policy, practice and research and helps to improve outcomes, Enterprise which promotes commercial profit necessary for charitable activities and The Place which maintains and renews estate for supporting the programmes.

Dartington Hall trust creates a distinct culture which derives inspiration from its founders. This culture embodies different values based on giving opportunity to one and all to help

improve the world, initiate new ideas, broaden perspective using a holistic approach towards teaching, deep understanding of craft and individual and collective creativity, all of which is required for deeper understanding of the whole.

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A. Das Gupta
Rabindranath Tagore in IndonesiaAn experiment in bridge-building

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ARUN DAS GUPTA

Rabindranath Tagore in Indonesia
An Experiment in Bridge-Building

The Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) set out from Calcutta on a three-and-a-half-month Southeast Asian tour on 12 July 1927.[1] He was accompanied by the noted philologist Suniti Kumar Chatterji, the artist, photographer and architect Surendranath Kar, and the painter and musician Dhirendra Krishna Deva Varman.[2] The party sailed from Madras to Singapore on the French ship *Ambois*. After a month's stay in Singapore and Malaya, Tagore arrived in Batavia via Sumatra on 21 August. The poet and his party soon left for Bali and spent the two weeks from 26 August to 8 September there. Thereafter Rabindranath returned to Surabaya and visited different places in Java from 9 to 30 September, on which date he left Batavia for Singapore. On his way back to India the poet paid a brief visit to Siam, that is, modern Thailand.

1 Known in Bengal as Rabindranath Thakur. 'Tagore' is an Anglicized form of the surname used by the poet in his English signature. He belonged to the Thakur Bari (house of Tagore), which was culturally the most advanced family in Calcutta in the nineteenth century. For bibliographical information on Tagore's life and work see below, note 3.

2 Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1890-1977) started his career as a university lecturer in English literature in Calcutta. In 1926 he obtained a D.Litt. degree for a dissertation entitled *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* under the supervision of Dr L.D. Barnett of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Apart from English, he knew French, German, Italian and Spanish. Among Indian languages he had a knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Urdu, and Hindi, besides his mother tongue, Bengali. He did not read Dutch, but could converse in broken Malay. While in Java, he noted down from scholars he met there the correct spelling and pronunciation of Dutch and Indonesian words and names. Surendranath Kar (1892-1970), vice-principal of the Kalabhavana (Art School) at Santiniketan, was the photographer of the team, but was a painter and architect in his own right. He made a large number of sketches during his Indonesian tour and was responsible for the architectural design of many buildings in Santiniketan, including Tagore's residence, Udayan.

ARUN DAS GUPTA, who obtained his PhD at Cornell University, is a Fellow of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. A specialist on the history of the Southeast Asian and Indian Ocean area, he is the author of, among other publications, 'Acheh in Seventeenth Century Asian Trade', *Bengal Past and Present*, January-June, 1962, and 'The Maritime Trade of Indonesia 1500-1800', in: M.N. Pearson and Ashin Das Gupta (eds), *India and the Indian Ocean*, pp. 240-75, Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1987. Professor Das Gupta's address is: 7D Regent Tower, 121/1 N.S.C. Bose Rd., Calcutta 700 040, India.

Introducing Rabindranath Tagore: his place in India's culture and politics

The appearance of Rabindranath Tagore as a creative writer of great power within the British colonial framework demands rethinking about the different social consequences of Western colonial rule in different countries in Asia. More specifically, there was a difference in elite formation between India and Indonesia.[3] The English East India Company in the seventeenth century could avail itself of the services of an existing group of middlemen consisting of commercial agents, middle-class landowners and educated officials. In Indonesia the marked presence of Chinese agents somewhat delayed the rise of an indigenous elite. Western education too was late in coming to the Dutch East Indies. Whereas in India the three metropolitan universities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay were already functioning by 1857, in Indonesia university-level education was not available till the 1920s. The Rechtshogeschool (Law College) was established in Batavia in 1924. It was not a university in the strict sense of the word, though eminent scholars with the stature of university professors provided a high standard of education here.

The Tagore family settled in colonial Calcutta (founded in 1690) as suppliers to foreign ships. They prospered and threw up a remarkable figure like Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1846), the grandfather of the poet Tagore. Dwarkanath was an industrial and business entrepreneur in his own right. He owned extensive areas of land as well as indigo factories, shipping concerns, salt, saltpetre, sugar and tea businesses, coalmines and banks. Dwarkanath was well educated and accomplished. He was taught English at one of the Eurasian institutions in Calcutta, Sherbourne School. He also acquired a knowledge of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. In the early 1840s Dwarkanath visited Europe, travelling via Italy and France to England, where he inspected factories and docks and, because of his accomplishments, was admitted to the inner circle of friends of Queen Victoria. A good pianist and a fine singer, Dwarkanath impressed the great Orientalist Max Mueller with his singing of Italian and French songs. He earned a reputation as a patron of the arts and learning in England and India.

The glory of the Tagore family was short-lived. The Carr-Tagore & Co. and the Union Bank which Dwarkanath had built up, collapsed in 1848.

3 For differences in elite formation, see Arun Das Gupta 1996:107-14, 1997:150-60, 1998: 129-41. For Western education in India and Indonesia, see Spear 1981:680, 719; Hall 1968:752, 757; Ricklefs 1981:150-2, 156-8. For the history of the Tagore family and the life of Rabindranath Tagore, see Kripalani 1980:13-32, 80-105, 151-81, 282-315, and 1981; Kling 1981; Tagore 1943, 1980, and 1985. The standard Bengali-language biography of Rabindranath Tagore is Mukhopadhyay 1953-1994; see also Pal 1982-2001. On the school in Santiniketan, see Uma Das Gupta 1975-76. For the Bengal Renaissance, see Susobhan Sarkar 1979. For the politics of Tagore, see Sumit Sarkar 1973. On Gandhi and Tagore, see Rolland 1924; Raychaudhuri 1999.

His son, Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), was able to overcome the crisis in family fortunes by dint of exceptional perseverance and strength of will. Having paid off his father's debts, he refrained from entering on fresh business ventures. The Tagores continued as a notable land-owning family till the time of Rabindranath Tagore. A basically religious person, Debendranath took up the unfinished work of Raja Rammohan Roy (1774-1833), the pioneer religious reformer of Bengal. In 1843 Debendranath formed the Brahmo Samaj, thereby launching the Brahmo reform movement, which influenced the poet Rabindranath at an impressionable age. The Brahmos were reformed Hindus, who shed idolatry and adopted congregational prayer, as that among Christians but directed to a formless God (Nirakar Brahma). Rabindranath, writing about the formative forces in his life, identified three distinct cultural currents in contemporary Bengal, namely, besides Rammohan Roy's religious reform movement, the literary revolution inaugurated by the writings of Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1858-1894) and the growing national awareness. These were elements in the cultural ferment in Calcutta, marked by the appearance of a galaxy of gifted writers, artists and musicians, inspired reformers, and ardent nationalists. Commonly known as the Bengal Renaissance, it was India's cultural response to the West – a phenomenon of far greater magnitude than the cultural movement Boedi Oetomo (Beautiful Endeavour) in Java or the May Fourth Movement in China, which were similar cultural responses to the West. It was a prolonged intellectual movement that existed for more than a century, from 1814, when Rammohan settled in Calcutta, to 1941, when Rabindranath Tagore died. Once the depth and scope of this nineteenth-century renaissance is gauged, Rabindranath Tagore appears to be just the tip of an iceberg. Nevertheless, coming at the end of a long process of cultural evolution, he created a world all his own through his writings and other work. Modern Bengal culture is a product of the Tagore era, which is not yet completely over.

A restless boy, Rabindranath avoided formal school education – something he never regretted in later life. He lived his long life as the subject of a colonial state, but his tremendous creativity was not curbed by the constraints of foreign rule. A tireless writer, Tagore turned out an endless stream of poems, songs, plays, short stories, novels, dance dramas, and serious essays on literature, society and politics. His collected works run to thirty-three volumes. Although he did not have prolonged training as a singer under the supervision of a guru, he composed more than two thousand songs, which are still sung today, through the innovative use of classical ragas and Western tunes. A distinguished modern painter, he has about two thousand paintings to his name. That he wrote in Bengali does not make him a provincial writer. Indians who speak other languages are familiar with his works through

translations. Many were attracted by his constructive work at Santiniketan. Like Gandhi, he was regarded as an important nation builder.

It is in this context that one should judge Tagore's activities at Santiniketan, where he founded a school in the ashrama style in 1901.[4] He offered a nationalist alternative to mainstream Western education imparted through the English medium. Tagore's endeavours to combine the wisdom and learning of the East and West drew attention from Indian as well as other Asian intellectuals. The school in Santiniketan expanded into an educational complex which included an art school (Kalabhavana), a school of music and dancing (Sangitbhavana), a research department (Vidyabhavana), and, in the adjoining village of Sriniketan, a centre of rural reconstruction. In 1921 was founded the international university Visva Bharati (World University), which comprised the above-mentioned institutions and which was to become a meeting-place for Indian and international scholars. Education received the highest priority in Tagore's nation-building programme. Gandhi, in fact, used to call him Gurudeva, the supreme teacher.

To meet the needs of a growing school with poor resources was a daunting task. Clearly the Santiniketan ashram demanded all the poet's attention. Despite all his preoccupations, however, Rabindranath was not unaware of what was happening in Indian politics. Nationalist self-consciousness first manifested itself in regional vernacular literatures. Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the greatest nineteenth-century Bengali literary figure, was the first to give the concept of Indian nationalism a concrete formulation through his novels and essays. The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, was a forum in which Western-educated Indians could voice the rightful wishes of the Indian people. Tagore was first drawn into nationalist politics at the time of the Swadeshi Movement (1903-1908), which arose in protest against the partitioning of the province of Bengal by the British rulers with the deliberate intention of weakening Bengali politics. Tagore composed a number of patriotic songs, which were sung in the streets of Calcutta and in the villages and towns of Bengal. He favoured 'Constructive Swadeshi' through *atma-sakti* (self-reliance) without going in for a direct confrontation with the British, and tried to keep his school in Santiniketan free from nationalist politics. By 1911, when he was fifty, Tagore was recognized as the foremost poet of Bengal. In 1913 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for his book of poems *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings). In recognition of his eminence as a poet, King George V of England conferred a knighthood on him in 1915. In 1919 Tagore returned this title in protest against the tragic killing by British soldiers of hundreds of unarmed Sikhs at Amritsar. This incident brought him into prominence

4 Santiniketan was originally an ashram founded by Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore, near Bolpur, a railway station about 90 kilometres north-west of Calcutta.

as a leading Indian spokesman. Much of this was known to the Dutch and Javanese intellectuals who invited the poet to visit Indonesia in 1927.

Sources of information

At this point I should give a brief explanation of the source materials I have used for this article. They include Tagore's own letters, written in Bangla (Bengali), from Malaya and Indonesia as contained in *Java Jatrir Patra* (see Tagore 1961), and Chatterji's detailed diary of the Indonesian tour, also written in Bangla (Chatterji 1964). *Java Jatrir Patra* was first printed, along with the *Paschim Jatrir Diary* (Diary of a Traveller to the West), in *Jatri* (A Traveller) in 1929 and was reprinted on the occasion of the Tagore Centenary in 1961. The poet's letters from Malaya, Bali, Java and Siam, written between July and October 1927, are also to be found in English translation in the (English-language) *Visva Bharati Quarterly* (including the *Visva Bharati News Letter*), 5-6, October 1927 to January 1929. Chatterji's diary with reports of the tour was first published by the Book Company in Calcutta in 1940, after being serialized in the Bengali journal *Prabasi* (of which Ramananda Chattopadhyay was editor) between Bhadra 1334 (September 1927) and Aswin 1338 (October 1931). I refer in this article to the enlarged edition published in 1964, a 700-page book written in Bengali without any English translation. With its wealth of details, it stands out as an important source in its own right on elite groups and cultural organizations interested in Tagore's visit to Malaya, Indonesia and Siam in 1927. The reader is also referred to *Prabasi*, Sraban 1334 / July 1927 and Bichitra Aswin 1334 / October 1927 to Aswin 1335 / October 1928.

From these materials it is possible to reconstruct a reliable account of Tagore's tour. I am aware that many Dutch and Indonesian newspapers and periodicals also contain reports and photographs of the Tagore visit to the then Dutch East Indies, but the information on the Indonesian side does not seem to have been fully processed. It became clear to me during my stay in Jakarta as a visiting teacher at the University of Indonesia in 1979-1981 that the Tagore visit then was well-nigh forgotten. It therefore came as a pleasant surprise to learn from the noted Indonesian historian and social scientist, the late Paramita Abdur Rachman, that Rabindranath Tagore happened to have been the first Indian she had ever met as a child. I discovered some material on the subject in the Museum Pusat in Jakarta. However, a thorough search in Indonesia and the Netherlands is likely to yield a great deal more information.

I have found it convenient to retain the colonial spellings of personal names and titles and institutional names as Chatterji found them in 1927.

Purpose of the Indonesian tour

Why did the Indian poet undertake this tour and how was it organized? Chatterji (1964) called it a cultural mission from Visva Bharati University in Santiniketan. The mission had two aims. Firstly, to study the remains of Indian civilization in the antiquarian relics as well as the life and the living arts in Indonesia and Farther India. Secondly, to bring about close cultural cooperation between India and these regions through an appreciation of the ideals of Visva Bharati. Chatterji's understanding of the purpose of Rabindranath's Southeast Asian tour is correct, if a little incomplete.[5]

The reader ought to bear in mind that Tagore was a widely travelled poet. He went on foreign tours as many as twelve times.[6] To put his travels in Southeast Asia in a proper perspective, one has to understand the nature of his interest in the area. For quite some time he was curious about Bali, probably because the Hindu religion and culture were still alive in that island. Rabindranath was fascinated by the generally accepted fact of the migration of Hindu colonists to Malaya, Indonesia and Indo-China, and was unaware of the criticism of the Greater India idea. He longed to see for himself what could be seen of the remains of ancient Indian culture in these countries. The chief motive behind his Southeast Asian journey was a desire to discover Indian culture in India's Southeast Asian frontier area. At a send-off given him by eminent Calcuttan scholars, Tagore said that he was going on a pilgrimage to India beyond its modern political boundaries (Tagore 1927). Another objective of this visit was to discover the Asian cultural identity.[7]

In this context the visit of the Indian poet to the Netherlands in 1920 proved to be of great significance. In a brief but informative article entitled 'Tagore in Holland' (1961), the noted Dutch critic, novelist and playwright Ben van Eysselstein tells us that Tagore's work was read in English translation in the Netherlands even before he became famous as the first Asian writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. It is remarkable that the outstanding Dutch writer Frederik van Eeden translated *Gitanjali* into Dutch in the very same year. Van Eeden translated more than ten books of Tagore's between 1913 and 1923, including *The Gardener*, *The Crescent Moon*,

5 Chatterji explained the purpose of the visit in his preliminary report on the tour (see undated extracts from this report in file Java, Rabindrabhavana Archives, Santiniketan). For the educational system in Santiniketan see Uma Das Gupta 1975-76.

6 Members of the Tagore family travelled a great deal. Grandfather Dwarkanath Tagore visited England, France and Italy in the mid-nineteenth century. Father Debendranath Tagore travelled extensively in India and reportedly went to Canton once. Rabindranath first visited England at the age of seventeen, and between 1878 and 1925 went on seven foreign tours. See Tripathi 1967.

7 File Java, Rabindrabhavana Archives, Santiniketan, Tagore Archives.

Sadhana, and *The Home and the World*. These works, writes Van Eysselstein, were re-creations rather than mere literal translations. Two other writers who translated Tagore into Dutch were Henri Borel and Raden Mas Noto Soeroto. The latter, a Javanese nobleman and the grandson of the head of the autonomous principality of Jogjakarta, Pakoe Alam V, was also a poet in his own right. Among other things, Noto Soeroto wrote a biographical sketch of Rabindranath Tagore and a book on Tagore's educational ideal.[8] Madelon Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis' highly informative and illuminating article on Noto Soeroto (1993) fully corroborates all this, and tells us a great deal more besides. This is not the place, however, to dwell at length on Noto Soeroto's crucial position in the intellectual world of the Netherlands in and around 1920, when the Tagore visit drew an enthusiastic response from writers there. Djajadiningrat shows conclusively that Noto Soeroto, because of his Dutch and Javanese antecedents, in a way prepared the ground for the Indian poet's visit to Indonesia in 1927. His close friend and associate Soeriosoeparto, an accomplished Javanese nobleman, also contributed to this by translating some of Noto Soeroto's Dutch-language writings on Tagore into Javanese. Soeparto, as the later Mangkoenegoro VII of Surakarta, actually played host to Rabindranath Tagore and his party in 1927, when Noto Soeroto was away from Java. It is important to note also that Noto Soeroto, as Djajadiningrat points out (personal communication December 2001), not only had connections with intellectuals in the Netherlands and the leading figures of Boedi Oetomo in Java, but also was in close touch with politically interested Indonesian students in the Netherlands. They included Soewardi Soerjaningrat (the later Ki Hadjar Dewantoro), who along with Soeparto and others played a leading role in Boedi Oetomo, which had thrown up the intellectuals who were interested in Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Java in 1927. Kalidas Nag, a noted Indian historian who briefly visited Indonesia in 1924, was pleasantly surprised to find that Rabindranath's works were known in Java through translations by persons like Noto Soeroto. Apart from distinguished writers, various student bodies in the Netherlands, like the Indische Vereeniging (Indonesian Students' Union) and the Chinese Students' Association Chung Hwa Hui, were eager to meet Tagore, in a desire to assert through him their Oriental Asiatic identity.[9] He was regarded as the eminently suitable cultural figure to be the spokesman of the East. In those days the East-West dichotomy was not yet unfashionable, but was a universally accepted fact.

8 Van Eysselstein (1961:309-12) mentions that Noto Soeroto named his eldest son after his literary and spiritual guru: Rawindra Noto Soeroto.

9 On Indonesian and Chinese student organizations in the Netherlands eager to meet Tagore, see file Java, Rabindrabhavana Archives, Santiniketan, Tagore Archives.

Tagore had already been to China and Japan, but Indonesia held a special attraction for him. Here he took upon himself the task of restoring the lost cultural ties with India. While he addressed audiences in different towns in Java, he established contact with Dutch and Indonesian archaeologists and educationists in order to work out a plan for an exchange of scholars and artists between Indonesia and his university at Santiniketan. Today Rabindranath Tagore is hardly remembered as the first person to launch a cultural exchange programme. Nonetheless, he was a pioneer bridge-builder between India and Indonesia in our period.

Ideals of Visva Bharati

Chatterji said that the idea behind Tagore's Southeast Asian tour was to prepare the ground for cultural cooperation with the region through appreciation of the ideals of Visva Bharati. What ideals did he have in mind? Tagore had founded the university at Santiniketan with the idea that it should be 'one nest for the world' – *yatra visvam bhabatyeka nidam* (where the world makes its home in a single nest).[10] It was envisaged as a world university where scholars of different nationalities would come together. International scholars, artists, educationists and agricultural experts did respond to Tagore's invitation to spend some time with the students of the ashram. Thus Sylvain Lévi from France, M. Winternitz from Prague, G. Tucci from Italy, C.F. Andrews, W. Pearson and L. Elmhirst from Britain, and Hori San and Okakura from Japan, along with many distinguished persons from different parts of India, gathered around the poet at his school in Santiniketan.[11] Himself an ardent nationalist, Rabindranath Tagore opened a door to the world. He called for international cooperation in the arts, education and culture at a time when India, led by Gandhi, was locked in an enormous non-violent combat with the British administration in India. Tagore's endeavour to forge a closer unity between East and West ran counter to the spirit of non-cooperation generated by the Gandhian movement. Despite negative criticism, Tagore persisted in his efforts to achieve cultural exchange and in his experiments in international co-existence.

It was not easy for a poet to run a school all by himself. A concrete way of supporting the ideals of Visva Bharati was of course by giving the institution financial support. Fund-raising was an open aim of Tagore's Southeast Asian tour. He turned to Indian businessmen who had settled in Southeast Asian countries for contributions for a cultural enterprise that was totally different

10 See Tagore's writings in *Visva Bharati and its Institutions*, 1961, Santiniketan: Visva Bharati.
11 On international scholars at Santiniketan, see Uma Das Gupta 1975-76:30, 35.

from Sun Yat-sen's, who sought the support of overseas Chinese for an avowedly political cause.

Organization of the tour

In this article I wish to take a close look at Rabindranath Tagore's Indonesian tour because it represents a serious attempt at establishing a two-way traffic in scholarship and the arts between India and Indonesia. How was the tour arranged? One striking thing about it is that it was privately organized and not officially sponsored.

The initiative for the invitation to the Indian poet was not taken by the Netherlands East Indies government but by a cultural society for the promotion of literature and the arts, the Kunstkring (Art Circle), in Batavia. The Java Instituut was also associated with the project, and right from the beginning the Dutch Indonesian government archaeological service (Oudheidkundige Dienst) was closely involved with the tour.[12] The noted Dutch musicologist Arnold Bake, who had been to Santiniketan, acted as mediator.[13] The British Indian government did not stand in the way of the tour, and the Dutch authorities in Indonesia did all they could to make the visit easy and comfortable for the Indian poet and his party, even though they were a little nervous about it because of recent communist uprisings in Indonesia, as Bake warned Tagore.[14] The Dutch colonial government did not want the poet's tour to advantage the rebels. However, the poet's assurance that he would keep out of politics reassured the local authorities.

It is not surprising that the Bengali poet received this invitation from Java. Cultivated circles in Java, both Dutch and Indonesian, were familiar with Rabindranath's work. Moreover, his nationalist school at Santiniketan was a source of inspiration for many intellectual nationalists in Java.[15] For an insight

12 Chatterji, Preliminary Report, file Java, Rabindrabhavana Archives, Santiniketan, Tagore Archives. According to Djajadiningrat (personal communication December 2001), Mangkoenegoro VII was Chairman of the Java Instituut and was one of the persons involved in its foundation in 1919.

13 Arnold A. Bake (1899-1963), who studied music at Santiniketan supported by a grant from the Kern Instituut in Leiden (where Bake's letters concerning his trip to Indonesia from July to November 1927 to prepare Tagore's tour are kept in Kast F48/4; personal communication Bart Barendregt), was accompanied by his wife, Corry Bake-Timmers. Both were in Indonesia at the time of Tagore's visit.

14 See Bake's letter to Tagore, 28 July 1927, file A. Bake, Rabindrabhavana Archives, Santiniketan.

15 Hall 1968:752; Nagazumi 1972:6-49, 151-160; Djajadiningrat, personal communication December 2001; Nag 1960:683.

into the background of Rabindranath Tagore's reception in Java, it is necessary to know something about the above-mentioned Boedi Oetomo movement. The cultural-nationalist organization Boedi Oetomo, like the Bengal Renaissance in India, represented a cultural awakening in Java which preceded and accompanied the nationalist movement. Founded in 1908 by a member of the lesser gentry known as 'Dokter Jawa' Wahidin Soedirohoesodo, in cooperation with students at STOVIA (a medical training school for native doctors), it was aimed at arousing a Javanese consciousness. Right from the beginning, Wahidin Soedirohoesodo and the student leader Soetomo advocated a blending of western education and Javanese culture. Akira Nagazumi (1972) gives an excellent description of the composition, aims and interests of the leadership of the organization as well as the movement itself. Boedi Oetomo would not have been what it was, however, without the patronage and support of the Pakoe Alam house of Jogjakarta, one of the four autonomous Javanese ruling houses. Jogja was chosen as the location for Boedi Oetomo's first congress, as this was 'where the heart of Java beats'. Of special importance was the part played by Pakoe Alam V, one of the founders of Boedi Oetomo. The organization was the heart of a primarily cultural movement without any political orientation. Soon, however, avowedly political groups and associations appeared in Java and there were attempts to bring politics into Boedi Oetomo, though these were unsuccessful. By the time Rabindranath Tagore and his party arrived in Java in 1927, the Boedi Oetomo movement was past its peak but the enthusiasm for combining western knowledge with traditional Javanese culture was still strong. Tagore was a symbolic figure for those who sought to integrate modern education with indigenous culture as an alternative to a totally Western education. This explains why Soewardi Soerjaningrat (Ki Hadjar Dewantoro), the founder of the Taman Siswa school in Jogjakarta, was eager to meet the poet during his visit to that city.[16] The Dutch government, however, recognizing Tagore's stature as a Nobel prizewinner, did not leave the initiative for arranging the poet's visit to nationalist groups, but let the Kunstkring, a dependable cultural association comprising members of the Dutch and Indonesian elites, take the responsibility for inviting him. In all this the role of Bake must have been crucial.

At the Indian end, leading industrial-merchant families like the Birla and Bajoria provided funding for the trip.[17] In Indonesia the long-settled Indian business communities of Batavia, Surabaya and elsewhere warmly welcomed the poet and gave generous contributions for Visva Bharati.

16 Soewardi Soerjaningrat is held in high esteem by modern Indonesians as a pioneer nationalist educationist. Classified by the Dutch as a political activist, he was exiled to the Netherlands. He founded the Taman Siswa (Garden of Pupils) school in Jogjakarta later, in 1922. See McVey 1967.

17 File Java, Rabindrabhavana Archives, Santiniketan; Chatterji 1964:488.

Batavia-Surabaya-Bali

Tagore crossed over from Penang to Belawan in Sumatra on 17 August 1927. Having spent a few hours in Medan, he left for Java on the boat *Plancius* on the same day, arriving in Batavia on 21 August. Among the welcoming party for the poet were Mr and Mrs Bake, Dr F.D.K. Bosch and Dr Hoesein Djajadingingrat, an eminent Javanese scholar who had studied law and Sanskrit in the Netherlands.[18] The Kunstkring organized a reception for the poet. At this gathering and at the dinner given by the British Consul in Batavia, Mr Crosby, the Indian party met a cross-section of the local community of intellectuals and Indian and Chinese businessmen. The Indian visitors then hurried off to Bali, as the poet had been advised not to miss the chance of seeing the rare spectacle of a cremation ceremony for a Hindu prince. Rabindranath and his entourage arrived at Boeleleng (Buleleng) in Bali on 26 August, having stopped over briefly in Surabaya on the way.

The Bali itinerary

From Buleleng the poet travelled to Bangli via Singaraja and Kintamani. He next visited Karang Asem in East Bali and spent time to rest at the hill station of Tampak Siring. He then was invited to the palace of the Raja of Gianyar. The party moved on to Badung or Den Pasar, whence they visited Ubud and Mundu before returning to Buleleng.[19] It was quite an intensive tour of Bali. The breath-taking beauty of the scenery overwhelmed the poet and his companions as they moved across the island. Bali, with its cremation rituals, large crowds of people at ceremonies, processions of women carrying religious offerings on their head, drama, dance and song performances, bustling market-places, and pageantry opened up incredible vistas of sound and colour to them. It was all something to be seen to be believed. Anyone who has been to Bali will agree that the island casts its spell on all outsiders without exception. For Rabindranath Tagore and his party there was, however, something else besides. The sight of Hindu ceremonies and festivals was both exciting and intriguing for the Hindu visitors from India. Bali unveiled to the Indian travellers something of their own lost culture as captured in a frieze. That the Indians were literally enthralled is borne out by Chatterji's ecstatic, detailed report of the tour. Tagore's own reaction as recorded in his letters was no less

18 Frederik David Kan Bosch (1886-1967) was director of the Dutch East Indies Archaeological Service and wrote extensively on the archaeology of Sri Vijaya; Hoesein Djajadiningrat (1886-1969) was the first Indonesian to obtain a doctorate from a Dutch university.

19 Chatterji, extracts, file Java, Rabindrabhavana Archives, Santiniketan.

enthusiastic. This is what he wrote: 'Along every village road processions of men and women were arriving with multifarious offerings. Some puranic age seemed to have come back to life before our very eyes, some picture from the Ajanta caves come out from the realm of art into the realm of life to revel in the sunshine.' (*Visva Bharati Quarterly* 5:325, = Tagore 1961:463.)

In Bali there were no lectures scheduled for the poet. However, he found the encounters with the rajas of Bangli, Karang Asem and Gïanyar rewarding. He was taken out on a motor ride to Karang Asem by the raja of that district, Hida Anake Agoeng Bagoes Djelantik, who was also the local magistrate. Because they did not have any language in common they were not able to have much conversation. As they were driving along, a patch of blue sea became visible through an opening in the forest. At that point the poet was startled to hear the raja break the silence by uttering the Sanskrit word *samudra*. The raja, seeing that this was surprising and pleasing to his eminent guest, went on to recite the other Sanskrit names for the sea: *sagar, abdhi, jaladhya*. Then he said: 'Saptasamudra, saptaparvat, saptaban, sapta-akash' (Seven seas, seven hills, seven forests, seven skies). A little later he recited the names of the Indian rivers Ganga, Jamuna, Narmada, Godavari, Kaveri, and Saraswati. India's geography seemed to be imprinted on the Balinese mind. By falling back on Sanskrit as a language of communication, the Balinese raja seemed to be giving recognition to an ancient bond with India (Tagore 1961: 56; Chatterji 1964:308).

Rabindranath was looked upon in Bali as a Mahaguru, not in the sense of a university professor but of something reminiscent of the ancient Indian Hindu sage Bharata Guru Agastya. The raja of Karang Asem, who had a philosophic cast of mind, wanted the poet to interpret some passages from the *sastra* (Balinese religious texts) for him. Chatterji, with his knowledge of Sanskrit, helped out as much as possible. The raja then surprised his Indian visitors by asking a philosophical question. He asked what, if the worship of gods, the building of temples, the performance of funeral ceremonies and the observance of social codes cannot be the final aim in life, man's ultimate quest should be. Chatterji replied by asking the raja to answer the question himself. Then came the startling reply: 'Dewa Dewa tida apa, Nirvana satu' (Gods and their worship are immaterial, Nirvana is the supreme goal) (Chatterji 1964: 378). Tagore was greatly touched and in his poem on Bali referred to this encounter as follows: 'We said the same mantras together, pondered over the same question of Nirvana'.[20] The visit of the great Indian poet touched a deeper chord in the raja. A sudden spiritual arousal could only occur in the presence of an Indian guru.

20 Chatterji 1964:325-6, translation mine. For an incomplete translation of the poem 'Bali', see Kabir 1966.

For Tagore Bali was a great deal more than a grand spectacle. Here, in this distant island, he was rediscovering India in his own way. Much as he enjoyed what he saw, he sensed deeper down that something had gone wrong with Bali in the past. Balinese cultural life seemed to lie entrapped in an archaic manifestation. The Balinese seemed to be acting out an ancient play in an endless cycle of repetitions. They had lost the power to break out of the mould. Though Rabindranath had come to Southeast Asia ostensibly in search of the remains of ancient Indian civilization, he was anything but a revivalist. In fact, he was plainly disturbed by what he found in Bali. A modern man with a forward-looking mind, Tagore was convinced that the present has a superior claim over the past. In this connection he wrote: 'The past was a great one [...] But still it is after all the Past and its duty was to fall behind the Present, not to come in front of it and stop the way of its self-manifestation. Now the present reduced to a mere steed of the past has to own defeat.' (Tagore 1961:49.)

Surabaya

On its return trip from Bali the Indian party arrived in Surabaya on 9 September 1927. Although Tagore's visit to Bali and Java was not a conducted tour in the strict sense of the word, high government officials and scholars delegated by the authorities constantly kept him company. When Tagore stopped off in Surabaya for a few hours on his way to Bali, he was taken by Bake to meet the local Resident. In Bali, the Resident of Bali and Lombok, L.J.J. Caron, attended the poet and the scholars G.W.J. Drewes, Samuel Koperberg and R. Goris, among others, accompanied him.[21] In Surabaya, as throughout his stay in Java, the poet was attended by many members of the Javanese elite. He became acquainted with old aristocratic families and made contact with Indonesian scholars, other intellectuals, and nationalist leaders. He and his group were invited to stay with the former Mangkoenegoro VI of Surakarta, who had voluntarily resigned as such and was now living in Surabaya to look after his sugar export business. The poet was charmed by his hospitality.[22]

21 G.W.J. Drewes (1899-1993), one-time director of Balai Pustaka in Batavia, was an authority on medieval Islam and Javanese literature. Samuel Koperberg was Secretary of the Java Instituut and had met Chatterji previously on a trip to Calcutta. Roelof Goris (1898-1965) was a specialist on Hindu ceremonies and rituals in Bali in particular and Hinduism in Indonesia in general.

22 Tagore 1961:8, *Visva Bharati Quarterly* 6:170. What Chatterji wrote about the princes of Surakarta, whom he referred to as rajas, and the four autonomous principalities of Java was based on what he heard from Dutch informants (Chatterji 1964:423). According to Djajadiningrat (personal communication December 2001) the Mangkoenegoro's status was independent of the Soenan, while his territory was almost as large and as old as those of the Soenan and the Sultan of Jogjakarta.

Also in Surabaya, intellectuals with nationalist sympathies were able to meet Tagore without interference from Dutch officials. Raden M. Harjo Soejono, the son of the Mangkoenegoro, who spoke excellent English and associated with Dr Soetomo and his circle, on 10 September gathered together about fifteen educated Javanese for a meeting with Tagore and the other Indian guests, at which a reporter from the Dutch newspaper *Indische Courant* was also present. These Javanese included doctors, lawyers, merchants, newspaper editors, and former government officials who, like Soetomo, had resigned their functions as a sign of non-cooperation and to whom Chatterji referred as Swarajists. The Swarajists had their own organizations, such as the Surabaya Indonesische Studieclub and its branches. They constituted a small but crucial group of highly educated intellectuals, many of whom had fluency in more than one European language besides Dutch. To Tagore they represented a challenging group of committed young men caught in a battle of ideologies. In reply to Tagore's call for a meeting of East and West, these young Javanese raised the question of whether such a union was possible in the face of continuing dominance and exploitation by the west. Tagore replied that there could not be any union along the path of universal competition for power and material goods, but that a meeting was possible on the intellectual and spiritual plane through an effort to understand one another. The discussion lasted two hours. The Surabaya intellectuals were eager to get as much out of the visitors as they could.

On 11 September Suniti Chatterji was asked by the Indonesische Studieclub to give a talk on the history of Santiniketan, ancient and modern education in India, and Tagore's ideas on the subject. On the same evening Tagore himself gave a talk on 'What is art?' at a distinguished gathering of the local Kunstkring (Chatterji 1964:418-20).

Surakarta

A long and tiring railroad journey took the Indian visitors to Surakarta. Despite failing health, the poet roughed it in the September heat in parts of Java where electric fans had never been heard of. Surakarta was the seat of one of the royal houses of Java and a centre of traditional Javanese art and learning. Rabindranath Tagore was the guest of honour of Mangkoenegoro VII, who was a cultivated man and a patron of Javanese culture and all that was best in it.[23] During his five-day stay in Surakarta (12-17 September) the poet was treated to a variety of Javanese dance, music and shadow play per-

23 For information on the place of the Mangkoenegoro in Javanese culture, see Djajadiningrat 1993:41-72.

formances. He was also invited to the palace of the Soesoehoenan (Soenan for short) here. In 1927 the Javanese dance tradition was in full vigour, and the Indians had a chance to attend some of the choicest performances. His own letters show that the poet was deeply stirred by what he saw. Commenting on a dance performed by two young girls, he wrote:

> One of the same two girls was now dressed as a boy with a clown's mask. It was wonderful, the way in which the beauty of the dance-movement and the costume and ornaments was kept intact, while the tone of the voice, the manner of singing and the gestures were all expressive of broad farce and moreover in keeping with the sex of the mask. I could not have imagined it possible that such refinement on the one hand and such clownish abandon on the other, could go together. It is because the dance is their chief means of artistic expression, that they can give rhythmic beauty also to the ludicrous. Even the ungainliness they cannot allow to be ugly, for their very demons have to dance. (*Visva Bharati Quarterly* 6:173, = Tagore 1961:89.)

Tagore was to return to the idea that dance was the basic Javanese form of expression again and again. Chatterji, who kept a detailed record of all the performances during the tour, informs us that the dances presented at the courts of both the royal houses included:

1. Wireng Pandji henem (*orde dans*) – based on an old Javanese historical tale;
2. Wireng Raden Hindradjit kalijan Wanara Hanoman – enactment of a fight between Prince Indrajit, the son of Ravana, and the monkey Hanuman, from the Ramayana;
3. Bekaan Golek – dance performed by a girl;
4. Wireng panah hoedoro – dance portraying a fight with bows and arrows between Abhimanjoe and Wersokoesoemo, son of Sambo;
5. Wireng Raden Werkoedoro kalijan Praboe Partipejo – a fight between Prince Brikodoro, or Bhima, and Lord Pratip;
6. Pertilan Langendrijo – Menak Djinggo den Damar Woelan – a fight between Menak-jingo and Damar-bulan, from a Javanese fable;
7. Temben and Batjak-dojok – a mask-dance play;
8. Wedojo – a dance performed by nine girls.

On 16 September the Indian party was invited to the house of Prince Koesoemajoedo to watch a typical Javanese shadow-theatre, or Wajang Poerwa, performance (Chatterji 1964:431-2, 446). This, too, was a memorable experience for Rabindranath. In his letter of 17 September the poet gives the following reaction and interpretation.

> The life of man with its joys and sorrows, its trials and triumphs courses along in waves of form and colour and sound. If we reduce the whole of it to sounds, it becomes rich music. Similarly, if we leave out everything else except its motion, it becomes pure dance. Whether it be rhythmic melody, or only rhythmic move-

> ment, it has a progress which influences our consciousness into a similar flow and keeps it alive and awake. Any deep realisation involves a rhythmic stimulation of our consciousness, and these people have kept alive the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata, with the constant swing of such movement. Like waves of emotion they stream over their lives in a continuous cascade. It is as if in their eagerness to taste the delights of these, they have naturally evolved this form of self-education eminently suited to their own temperament.

About the moving shadows on the lighted screen Tagore writes:

> [...] they were a form of story-telling by movement, just as was their dance. For it became clear that their dance, also, is not intended to display the beauty of motion, but it is their language – the language of their history and their annals. Their gamelan also is but a tonal dance, [...] it also is not intended to express musical beauty, but is only a setting for the rhythm of their dance. [...] we were taken over to the dark side where the women were seated. Here the pictures or their manipulations were no longer visible, but only the shadows dancing on the lighted screen, like the dance of Mahamaya on the body of the prostrate Shiva. We see the creation only when the Creator, who abides in the region of light, conceals himself behind it. He who knows that with the created forms the Creator is in constant connection knows the truth. He who sees the process of creation apart from the Creator, sees only Maya. There are seekers of truth who would tear away the screen and go over to the other side – that is to say they want to see the Creator apart from his creation – and nothing can be so empty as the Maya of their illusion. This is what I felt as I looked at this show. (*Visva Bharati Quarterly* 6:178, = Tagore 1961:96-7.)

Intellectual and educational contacts

As I write this, the person I miss most is my guru, the late Claire Holt of Cornell. An authority on the Indonesian arts, she gave me and my fellow-students a most interesting and informative course on Indonesian art and showed us her fascinating collection of slides of Indonesian paintings. Although the cultural study of Indonesia has advanced a great deal since 1927, I do believe that Claire Holt would have loved to know what Rabindranath Tagore had to say about art and culture in Indonesia. Unfortunately Tagore was primarily known to her and the rest of the world as the writer of *Gitanjali*, a book of devotional lyrics that had won him the Nobel Prize. That he was also a composer of two thousand songs, a painter in his own right, an innovator of *nritya-natya* (*nritya* = dance, *natya* = theatre or play) as a form of dance drama, a novelist, and an educational experimenter is not generally known. But how many care about Tagore and what he was to the Bengalis and Indians?

I am not writing this article with the idea of projecting Rabindranath Tagore's versatility as a creative person. My aim is to draw the attention of Indonesianists who have chosen to turn away from India on the ostensible

grounds of objective evaluation of the Indonesian culture as an autonomous reality. The question is whether India can reasonably turn away from West and Central Asia and still arrive at a correct understanding of its own culture. Or whether it would be right for Vietnam to look away from China and turn upon itself. Tagore, in trying to understand the Indonesian world, drew upon his rootedness in Indian culture, which in a sense forms Indonesia's outer boundary. While trying to reconstruct India's past in the light of extant Indian elements in traditional Indonesian arts, he did not ignore Indonesia's predicament as it was caught in the process of coming to terms with the modern West. In fact, he was curious to discover for himself the exact nature of the shift from the traditional to the modern way of life and thinking effected by the Dutch and the Indonesians. Leading representatives of the Indonesian elite were eager to meet Tagore precisely because he was known as a path-breaking experimenter who combined traditional Asian ideals with modern Western education. They were not much concerned about Tagore's rediscovery of India in Indonesia.

As well as attending dance, drama and shadow-play performances, Rabindranath and his companions loved to stroll through the corridors and galleries of the Javanese royal palaces. Tagore's letters from Java are full of descriptions of the effortless artistry of the day-to-day life of the occupants of the sprawling palaces. Above all else, the aesthetic design underlying Javanese life made a lasting impression on him. At the time the Indian party was travelling across Bali and Java, much of the older culture was still intact. Some day, it is to be hoped, Tagore's letters and Chatterji's detailed account will be recognized as important source material for the cultural history of Indonesia in the late nineteen-twenties.

In Surakarta a packed programme kept the Indian visitors busy from early morning till late night. Receptions, literary gatherings, lectures, and visits to various institutions followed each other in endless succession. Useful contacts were made inside and outside the palace. On the day the Indians arrived in Surakarta (12 September) the well-known Javanese scholar Dr Radjiman joined them to accompany them to many gatherings and other functions.[24] In the evening there were dance performances and dinner at the palace, on which occasion Tagore's poem on Java, which had been translated into Javanese by the Mangkoenegoro himself, was sung by local singers. The next day a visit to the Java Instituut was arranged for the Indians. Here they met the celebrated young Dutch scholar of medieval Javanese religion and literature, Dr Theodore Gautier Thomas Pigeaud (Chatterji 1964:429). At a grand reception on the evening of 14 September a typewritten programme

24 Chatterji 1964:423-7. Dr Radjiman was an active member of Boedi Oetomo (Nagazumi 1972: 45-6) and in Surakarta soon became a consultant on traditional Javanese culture.

with a folder containing Tagore's poem on Java in English and Dutch translation, autographed by the poet and the Mangkoenegoro, was distributed. The Indians made the acquaintance of the Dutch engineer J.J. Moens (who was also well informed on Hindu culture in Indonesia) and the noted architect T. Karsten, who were also interested in Javanese religion, art and architecture. A lecture was organized at the local Kunstkring, where Tagore spoke on India's attitude to the problem of conflict between nations. Chatterji was asked to give a talk on Tagore's educational ideals at a Protestant Teachers' Training College. On 16 September the Indian group met the famous Dutch authority on ancient Hindu culture in Indonesia, W.F. Stutterheim, who was then the director of a school for Javanese students (Chatterji 1964:430-3, 440-3). The latter expressed himself in favour of introducing Sanskrit and Kawi at his school. Also the subject of the possibility of Indian cooperation for the interpretation of recently discovered Balinese inscriptions came up for discussion. Next the poet was taken to the Van Deventer School for Javanese girls – of which the Mangkoenegoro was a patron. He was shown round the classrooms and the boarding-house, which he liked very much. Before his departure for Jogjakarta, he was given a reception with Javanese poets at the Contact Club. Poems from his *Katha o Kahini* (Stories and Fables) were recited in Dutch and Javanese translation. The reply of a Javanese poet to Tagore's poem on Java was also read out and sung.

The Surakarta experience was a high point in Tagore's visit to Java. Without seeing the performances at the Javanese courts for themselves, the Indians would not have known what great heights of perfection Javanese dancing had attained. They might have mistakenly believed that the ancient Indian dance had been preserved in its original form in far-away Java. The affinity between Javanese and Indian dancing is indisputable, but at what point in time the Javanese dance and drama departed from the classical Indian model to develop their own distinctive style is still unknown. Rabindranath Tagore's letters and Chatterji's diary testify that being exposed to Javanese enactments of stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata was a thrilling experience for the Indians. In spite of their own natural orientation, the Indian visitors could not but recognize the originality of the art of Java. Their minds were full of Surakarta as they travelled on to Jogjakarta, the other great centre of Javanese culture and education.

Off to Jogjakarta

On 18 September Tagore's three young companions, Deva Varman, Kar and Chatterji, left for Jogjakarta by car together with Samuel Koperberg. The poet's departure was postponed a little, as he was requested to stay on for a

while to open a road named after him, Tagorestraat.

Rabindranath's letters concerning Jogjakarta are less detailed than those about Surakarta, as much time was taken up visiting Java's antiquarian remains there. Chatterji, however, gives graphic descriptions of the Prambanan and Borobudur reliefs, as well as of other nearby sites. F.D.K. Bosch and P.V. van Stein Callenfels provided constant company and guidance. The Indian visitors were delighted to discover that the Siva and Brahma temples of Prambanan contained in their terrace walls sculptured reliefs of Ramayana scenes the likes of which were not to be found in any Indian temple. Concerning the episodes from Krishna stories carved in another frieze on the Vishnu temple, which the Dutch scholars were in the process of comparing with the Bhagavata text, Chatterji learned from Bosch that there were divergences between the reliefs and the text. Thus the episode of Krishna's dalliance with the milkmaids of Vrindavana (Krishnalila with the Gopinis) from the Bhagavata is not found in the Javanese reliefs, which on the other hand contain representations of stories that are not found in the text. Likewise, many Puranic tales unknown in India are represented in the Prambanan reliefs. This was an intriguing discovery.

The Prambanan temple complex, also known as Candi Loro Djonggrang, was in a very poor condition. Although large portions of temple wall were still standing on their high plinths, all three structures had their upper part missing. Broken fragments lay scattered all over the grounds and the nearby shallow river bed. The Indian party was here just in time to watch a stage in the incredible feat of reconstructing the temples. This daring engineering project, in which archaeologists, art historians and engineers worked together, was in progress right then. On the one hand the Dutch historians were delving deep into the Indian Silpasastra to uncover the ancient Indian temple-building canons, on the other hand the engineers, who had to give structural considerations most weight, were relying on the intuition of the Javanese craftsmen, who unerringly put the broken fragments together as in a giant jigsaw puzzle. It is a miracle story of cross-cultural collaboration, and full credit goes to the Netherlands East Indies government for sponsoring the scheme.

Tagore arrived at the Prambanan site a little exhausted from the car drive from Surakarta. Unlike Chatterji and the others, he was not an indefatigable sightseer. He climbed the stairs of the Siva temple with difficulty and sat down to have a look around. The Prambanan temples and their layout on the banks of a small stream pleased him a great deal. He joined the tea party beside the temple, which Van Stein Callenfels, with his irrepressible humour, for which he was affectionately nicknamed Tuan Reksoso (Mr Demon) or Werkodara (Bhima), kept amused (Chatterji 1964:455-62).

The Indian guests arrived in Jogjakarta around 11.30 in the morning.

Here they received hospitality from the Pakoe Alam, who was second to his overlord the sultan. At the palace a Serimpi dance, a group dance for four girls at a time, was performed in the evening. Rabindranath thought this was the best dance he had seen so far in Java. Dinner was served at the Pakoe Alaman at eleven, a rather unusual hour for the poet. In the course of the dinner the Indian guests learned that young Indonesian Muslim boys were now going to India, besides Mecca, for the further study of Islam. Pakoe Alam talked about the presence of Indian elements in Indonesian culture. He claimed, however, that mysticism, born out of a certain introversion, was the fundamental characteristic of Javanese culture.

On 19 September Chatterji and Deva Varman visited the Tjandis Loembeng, Sewoe, Plaosan and Kalasan accompanied by Bosch and Van Stein Callenfels. They took another trip to Prambanan, where they made the acquaintance of a Mr Van Haan, the engineer then in charge of the restoration of the ruined Prambanan temples.

Apart from the remains of ancient Hindu-Buddhist temples and stupas, Jogjakarta was famous for its nationalist educational institutions. The Indians in fact came into contact with members of the Dutch and Javanese elite who were devoting themselves to the advancement of education in Indonesia, as well as the preservation of the traditional arts. There were a number of institutions grouped under Darmo Sedjati, a kind of religio-cultural council. They included Krido Bekso Wiromo, a centre for Javanese dance and music under the direction of Goesti Pangeran Ario Tedjokoesoemo, a member of a royal family; Wanito Oetomo, a women's society aiming at the advancement of women through education in the home sciences; Taman Siswa, a nationalist coeducational kindergarten headed by Raden Mas Soewardi Soerjaningrat; and Habirando, a training school for *dalang*, with Raden Mas Ario Gondhoatmodjo as president. The Indians visited all four institutions and were impressed by the efficiency of these nation-building organizations.

After dinner at the Pakoe Alam's palace the poet was invited by the *patih*, or chief minister of the sultan, to attend a Ramayana dance performance to be given by the boys in his family and of the royal house. In this dance drama the Ramayana story was enacted from the beginning to the episode of the slaying of the giant bird Jatayu by Ravana. The dancing was accompanied by singing, and a little boy played the part of Sita. Tagore had seen Javanese dancing in Surakarta and thought it exquisite, but he was no less impressed by what he saw here. As he watched the performance, he mused about the characteristic Javanese attitude to life and art. In his letter of 20 September 1927 he wrote:

> What we call play-acting consists chiefly of words supplemented by a representation of events and emotions. But this was not so here. The main thing with the Javanese is the display of pictures and rhythmic movements, pictures that are not

intended to represent anything, but to charm the mind, for which purpose, even a wide divergence between what is shown and what is to be seen in real life, is accounted no obstacle. For instance, men actually get about erect on their legs, but in these plays all their moving has to be done squatting, and that not in the usual way, but in dance motion.

They have evidently imagined for themselves a world in which this is the ordinary method of progress. Had this imaginary world of crouching inhabitants been one of broad farce, one could have understood it. But this is not at all the case. It is, on the contrary, a world of high epic! They evince thus but scant respect for Nature, but Nature does not, as might have been apprehended, revenge herself by making them ridiculous. They have achieved their bold project of making even a travesty of Nature beautiful. It is as if they would defiantly proclaim that it is the picture of their own making, and not nature, they desire to exhibit. (*Visva Bharati Quarterly* 6:276-7, = Tagore 1961:104-7.)

A striking thing he observes about the Javanese mind is that it refrains from enquiring into the meaning of acts and words.

We outsiders ask them the meaning, they say they do not know, it suffices for them that their craving for aesthetic emotion (rasam) is fulfilled. That is to say, it is not meaning, but some inner satisfaction that they ask. A Dutch savant on another occasion remarked to me that these people do not care about the religious significance of the ceremonies of worship they perform; here also it is the rasam that they are after. This may perhaps be explained by saying that they have within them their own idea of Beauty of Perfection, and any external performance that is attuned to it evokes a response from it and gives them joy – a joy that may surely be called spiritual. (*Visva Bharati Quarterly* 6:277, = Tagore 1961:104-7.)

Tagore belonged to a culture which looks for significance in things. The unexpected phenomenon of people avoiding the search for meaning was something that called for observation and comment.

The structure of the Borobudur left the poet unimpressed, though he liked the individual sculptures.

It is so cut up in galleries, one above the other, and its pinnacle is so disproportionately small that in spite of its size, it lacks in dignity. It looks like a mountain with a diminutive stone cap. It was perhaps intended as a mere repository for the stone figures – hundreds of Buddhas and sculptured pictures representing the Jataka stories – like a huge tray with these sculptures heaped thereon. For, when taken up one by one, they are extraordinarily good. I specially liked the Jataka pictures – crowds of figures depicting the multifarious play of the daily life of the times, but nowhere tainted with obscenity or vulgarity. In other temples I have seen images of gods and goddesses, or scenes from the sacred epics. But here we have life in its work-a-day aspect, be it king or beggar. (*Visva Bharati Quarterly* 6: 374-5, = Tagore 1961:115-7.)

Out of Hinduism and Buddhism, Rabindranath had a preference for the lat-

ter. Brought up in a Brahmo atmosphere in Calcutta, he had become critical of the rituals and practices of orthodox Hinduism and he felt personally drawn to the great Buddha and his message of compassion for all living creatures. Looking at the Borobudur stupa, he had a deep appreciation for the spirit behind the building of this great Buddhist shrine. He finished writing a long poem on the Borobudur while sitting on the porch of the *pasangrahan* at the foot of the monument. It was the second of his three memorable poems on Indonesia.

On 24 September, the last day of their stay in Jogjakarta, the Indian visitors entered a relatively unknown terrain, that of Islamic modernism. Jogjakarta was an important centre of Islamic reformist education, which sought to combine the Islamic identity with nationalism. A Marathi-speaking resident of Bombay, Mirza Ali Baig, who acted as a link between Javanese and Indian Muslims in the context of religious self-awareness and educational experimentation, came to see the poet and to invite Chatterji to look around in the quarters of the principal organization, Muhammadiya. Mirza, who knew a little Sanskrit, was in favour of preserving all that was beautiful and elegant in traditional Javanese culture. Chatterji writes that there were thirty-two Dutch-Javanese schools and sixty primary schools in Java under Muhammadiya sponsorship. He talked to young Muslim boys who had been to India to study Arabic and Persian. He was also taken on a visit to a Muslim girls' school, founded by a Mrs Dachlan. The girls were taught the Arabic prayer for *namaz* without, however, being informed of its meaning (Chatterji 1964:482-3).

The return journey

Jogjakarta was the last important stop in Java for Rabindranath and his party. They made brief stops on their return trip in Bandung and Batavia, arriving in Bandung, accompanied by Pigeaud and Koperberg, in the evening of 24 September. This cool mountain resort gave the poet a much-longed-for respite from the hot Javanese and Balinese summer. The next evening he gave a talk on art at the local Kunstkring. On 26 September the Indian party visited a theosophical teacher-training centre in nearby Lembang. At this school, called Goenoeng Sari, the poet attended a pan-religious prayer meeting with readings from the Koran and Bible and the Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu scriptures.

The Bandung visit turned out to be something really special because of an unscheduled meeting with the young Indonesian nationalist political leader Soekarno. The poet had generally kept clear of political contacts in Indonesia, since he had promised the Dutch authorities to do so. Here in Bandung, with no Dutch officials present, Koperberg took the initiative to

introduce Soekarno and two other young Sundanese activists to the Indians. Soekarno spoke good English. It became clear in the course of the conversation that the young Indonesian nationalists were keeping a sharp eye on the Indian political scene. They knew a great deal about Gandhi, Chittaranjan Das, Motilal Nehru and Sarojini Naidu. The poet and his companions were much impressed by the charming young leader.

On that same day the poet left by train for Batavia, where he stayed from 27 to 30 September. At a last Kunstkring meeting on 29 September he read his poems in Bengali and in English translation to the assembled members. He furthermore made the acquaintance of Mr Maclain Pont, the archaeologist in charge of the excavations at Majapahit in East Java. Another important meeting took place between Chatterji and the famous Javanese scholar Poerbatjaraka, who had studied Sanskrit in the Netherlands and had done research on Agastya, the incarnation of Siva Guru. Rabindranath, accompanied by Surendranath Kar, left Batavia for Singapore on his way to Bangkok in the morning of 30 September. Chatterji stayed behind for a lecture assignment at the Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen. The poet composed his famous poem on Bali, 'Sagarika', in which he paid tribute to that island and to the Indonesian people, on board the ship *Mijer* on 1 October (Chatterji 1964:487, 492, 498).

The significance of the tour

What did the visits of the Indians to different places in Bali and Java achieve? What did they mean to the Indian visitors themselves and to their Indonesian hosts? For obvious reasons, each side got different things out of the tour. Tagore's presence made the trip specially important for the Indians.

The journey is well covered in letters and diaries written in Bangla. Out of the 25 letters published in Tagore's *Java Jatrir Patra*, 12 deal with Bali and Java, and much of this has appeared also in English translation. Out of Chatterji's 700-page account published in 1964, 376 pages are devoted to Bali and Java. Records of the visit on the Dutch and Indonesian side remain to be explored. Clearly the Indian visit aroused much enthusiasm in Indonesia at the time, but has now passed out of memory.

Tagore's plans for setting up a programme of cultural exchange between India and Indonesia did not materialize. Although a few persons went on exchange visits, the idea did not catch on on any significant scale.

To grasp the significance of the tour, one has to have an understanding of the viewer as well as of the viewed. For those who do not read Bangla it will be difficult, if not impossible, to understand Tagore's and Chatterji's cultural standing in its full extent. Tagore, known to the world as a writer of

devotional hymns, was an eminent exponent of Indian culture. Chatterji, a giant of a scholar, had a thorough knowledge of Indian history, religion and art. In Indonesia, both were thrilled by what they believed to be a continuation of Indian religious and artistic traditions. Yet both also appreciated the presence of indigenous elements that had drastically transformed the Indian tradition. For Tagore, known for his quest for symmetry and harmony in art and literature, as well as in nature and the human world, it was not easy to accommodate the odd and the angular, the unusual and seemingly unnatural. However, because of his enormous openness to new experiences, he was able to take everything in his stride. During the tour, he usually worked deep into the night to write up his experiences in his poetic and sensitive letters.

Bill Dalton (1976:19) ascribes the statement 'I see India everywhere, but I do not recognise it' to Tagore, though I have not been nable to trace the source of this remark. While the first part of this statement is correct, the second is misleading. Tagore directly understood and enjoyed much of what he saw in Bali and Java. Of course he saw most of it as a variation on Indian art and religion. Not so clear, however, was the nature of Javanese culture, the sophistication and the stylized character of the Indonesian performing arts, which expressed themselves in a different idiom. In this respect the constant presence of Dutch and Indonesian experts and their unfailing help and guidance was most useful. The Indian party was fortunate in meeting numerous Dutch and Javanese scholars who had made the study of Javanese art and religion their life's work. It is nothing short of a miracle that on the Dutch side such experts as Bosch, Van Stein Callenfels, Koperberg, Stutterheim, Pigeaud, Drewes and Moens, and on the Indonesian side the scholars and educationists Djajadiningrat, Poerbatjaraka, Soewardi Soerjaningrat, Mangkoenegoro VII of Surakarta and the Pakoe Alam of Jogjakarta were all available for consultation at the time. Tagore gratefully acknowledged the special attention he received from the Dutch experts at Borobudur, saying:

> I was immensely pleased with the simplicity and warm-heartedness which accompanied their scholarship. [...] They have dedicated their lives to make the dumb figures speak. It is to their love of knowledge for its own sake that their strenuous labours are due, for the history and culture of India, the study of which they have made their life's work, [...] we must accept them as our Gurus if we would understand India in its completeness. (*Visva Bharati Quarterly* 6:375-6, = Tagore 1961:117.)

Clearly Tagore believed he was looking at India when he was walking along the galleries of Borobudur. At the same time, when confronted with the strong Javanese personality and individuality in Javanese dance dramas and shadow plays, he accepted this with grace and deep appreciation. He had set out from India to study the particular form of Indian culture as it was found

in India's Southeast Asian frontier region on the spot. When he found himself treading a rather unfamiliar terrain, however, he was not disappointed. On the contrary, he drank eagerly from the streams of Indonesian indigenous culture, which comprised a creative combination of Indian and Javanese elements. The reason he was able to accept everything Java had to offer was that he recognized it as a region from the epics. He suggested that 'island India' might appropriately be named 'Vyas Indies', after the legendary author of the Mahabharata, Vedavyas (Tagore 1961:94). Notwithstanding what he had learned from the Dutch and Indonesian scholars about the distinctiveness of Javanese culture, he could not shake off his Indian bias. He was constantly looking to India for comparison on major and minor points, and in the process gained a fuller understanding of his own culture. Looking back from the frontier proved fruitful.

The encounter with modern Indonesia with its educational experiments and nationalist politics was no less instructive. It is significant that educationists like Soerjaningrat and Stutterheim were eager to meet the poet and that young political activists like Soekarno, Soetomo and others wanted to enter into a dialogue with him. It appears that India and Indonesia at one point in their history extended the hand of friendship to one another. For one brief moment they looked each other in the eyes and recognized an ancient bond and the possibility of a new partnership. The chance of a lifetime came and was missed, as the visit of Rabindranath Tagore to Java and Bali testifies.

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Annexure-8

sva-bharati.ac.in) within two days from the date of publication of the merit list of a particular subject. If any discrepancy is identified in the merit list it will be addressed immedia

SANTINIKETAN

At Santiniketan the environment is always present in one"s consciousness. It becomes a part of one"s being here, more than anywhere else, which is why it grows on you and having lived here once it is difficult to forget. The Santiniketan environment has changed, grown and evolved with its community.

Santiniketan is situated at an elevation of 200 feet above sea-level giving it a slight bulge in an otherwise flat landscape. The ground slopes gradually to 100 feet above sea-level near the Ajay river about 3 miles to the south and the Kopai stream some 2 miles to the north. The southern boundary of Santiniketan merges into a vast plain of rice fields. On its northern fringes were the khoai lands with deeply indented gullies caused by erosion over denuded land. The District Gazetteer of Birbhum records that in pre-British days, Birbhum had an extensive forest cover. Progressive denundation of forests played havoc with the porous laterite soil. During the hot months, fierce dust storms scattered the loose soil far and wide. During the rains heavy erosion took place as after every downpour water rushed through undulating land creating gullies and gorges in its relentless march.

In the middle of the 19th century, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore found solace and serenity in this barren land. He purchased the land and started the construction of a house rightaway. This house, named, Santiniketan, was built in the early 1860s; the name later came to denote the entire area. A beautiful garden was laid out on all sides of the house. The top-layer of gritty dry soil was removed and filled with rich soil brought from outside. Trees were planted for fruit and shade. Change in the environment had begun.

As a child, Rabindranath accompanied his father to Santiniketan and recalled, much later, in Reminiscences, Though I was yet a mere child my father did not place any restriction on my wanderings. In the hollows of the sandy soil the rain water had ploughed deep furrows, carving out miniature mountain ranges full of red gravel and pebbles of various shapes through which ran tiny streams, revealing the geography of Lilliput... I was never tired of roaming about among those miniature hills and dales in hopes of lighting on something never known before.

I was the Livingstone of this undiscovered land which looked as if seen through the wrong end of a telescope. Everything there, the dwarfed date palms, the scrubby wild plums and the stunted jambolans, was in keeping with the miniature mountain ranges, the little rivulet and the tiny fish I had discovered.

When, in 1901, Rabindranath started his Brahmacharyasrama, he found the asrama "flanked on the south by a sal avenue and an entrance gate covered by a canopy of Madhavi creepers. To the east was an orchard of mango trees. Towards the west were a few palmyra palm, jamun, casuarina and, here and there, some coconut palms. Standing on the north-western outskirt of the old asrama were the two ancient Chhatim trees." Rabindranath"s choice of Santiniketan for his school was definitely because of its environment. In "My School", he has written:

"I selected a beautiful place, far away from the contamination of town life, for I myself, in my young days, was brought up in that town in the heart of India, Calcutta, and all the time I had a sort of homesickness for some distant lane somewhere, where my heart, my soul, could have its true emancipation... I knew that the mind had its hunger for the ministrations of nature, mother-nature, and so I selected this spot where the sky is unobstructed to the verge of the horizon. There the mind could have its fearless freedom to create its own dreams and the seasons could come with all their colours and movements and beauty into the very heart of the human dwelling."

The celebration of seasons was always a feature in the asrama. These festivals came to be associated with the special culture of this institution and the introduction of traditional Indian forms and rituals in organising these festivals, including the decoration of the site, use of flowers, alpana, chanting of Vedic hymns and blowing of conch-shells gave them a new dimension, aesthetically attractive, intrinsically Indian yet totally secular. Rabindranath felt, it was necessary that an affinity be built between the students" minds and the flora and fauna of the asrama.

It was always the objective in Santiniketan that learning would be a part of life"s natural growth. The first step towards this objective was to establish in the child a sense of oneness with nature. A child has to be aware of his surroundings - the trees, birds and animals around him. The mind is deprived if one is indifferent to the world outside. Rabindranath said we concentrate on learning from books and neglect the knowledge that is freely available on all sides.

From the beginning, he wanted his students to be aware of their environment, be in communication with it, probe it, make experiments and collect data and specimens. And to guide them he wanted teachers who could go beyond book-learning, who were seekers themselves and who would find joy in the process of learning. In this context one might mention Tejeschandra Sen, who along with Jagadananda Roy, was one of the pioneering teachers of Nature Study in India. They were able to instill in children a love for and curiosity about the natural world. Lord Haldane, visiting Santiniketan in 1954 was much impressed with Tejeschandra" s method of teaching.

In the mid-fifties, to prevent further erosion by the khoai, soil embankments were raised which thereby created little lakes of moderate size. The bunding of the Mayurakshi river some distance on the north-west brought Santiniketan a branch of an irrigation canal which forms its northern boundary. Thus started, the greening of khoai brought about significant changes in the environment. An extensive forest has been created where deer graze.

However, Santiniketan today is a veritable botanists" paradise. Plants, trees, creepers and orchids from various parts of India and abroad have been made to flourish in this once semi-desert. Rabindranath himself took a deep interest in planting trees. He introduced the Vriksharopana, or tree-planting ceremony in 1928, popularising the concept. His son, Rathindranath, was a horticulturist by training and introduced a number of new trees and plants into Santiniketan. Fortunately, the Santiniketan community in general shares this interest in trees and gardening. The seasons are clearly marked in Santiniketan; one knows the end of one season and the beginning of the other with the sights and smell of blossoms in bloom.

One cannot write of the Santiniketan environment without mentioning Ramkinkar Baiz. His outdoor sculpture is a part of our environment, not meant to be exhibited in museums. Children grow up with them, treating them as much a part of the environment as the trees and sky. Made of locally available material, these sculptural pieces depict life in and around Santiniketan. The Santhal Family or the Call of the Mill are so integral to Santiniketan that they do not evoke the same emotions when seen in its bronze cast in the capital of India! When Sujata was placed in Sangit Bhavana by Ramkinkar, walking towards the Buddha, Nandalal Bose planted eucalyptus trees around it to accentuate its height and blend it in a natural scene.

In the paintings of Nandalal Bose and Binodebihari Mukhopadhyay, the Santiniketan landscape has been captured for posterity. Surendranath Kar, Nandalal Bose and Rathindranath Tagore were acutely aware of the environment and took great pains to design buildings and houses that would merge with its surroundings.

However, although the outskirts have developed and altered, the main campus or core area of the asrama has undergone comparatively lesser change and retains the quiet, picturesque, sylvan atmosphere that gave Santiniketan its distinctive charm.

The same joyous atmosphere is evident and the children look as happy and free as ever. Classes even to this day are held under the trees. The first day of rains is